

SERMON
On the Gospel Reading of the 12th Sunday of Matthew (Mt. 19:16-26)
(23 August 2026)

The Evangelist Matthew preserves for us this important event that we have just heard in today's Holy Gospel. It is not a parable or one of the Lord's illustrative teachings, but an actual historical encounter.

A wealthy young man, what we might call a young nobleman of his day, approaches Christ and asks Him how he may inherit eternal life. He is not a carefree youth who spends his fortune on pleasures and entertainments. As the Gospel goes on to reveal, he is a conscientious young man who lives, or at least sincerely strives to live, according to the Mosaic Law. He keeps the commandments and is deeply concerned for the salvation of his soul. He is searching, seeking the truth, and the reputation of Jesus has evidently drawn him to Him. Christ recognises the sincerity of his intentions and gradually leads him into the truth.

As the first step toward eternal life, the Lord points to keeping God's commandments. Significantly, however, He does not begin with those commandments of the Decalogue that govern humanity's relationship with God. Instead, He emphasises the commandments that regulate our relationship with our fellow human beings, concluding with the commandment, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." The young man assures Christ that he has observed these commandments from his youth. Yet he senses that something is still lacking. "What do I still lack?" he asks. He does not ask this out of pride or self-satisfaction. Rather, he cannot escape a legalistic way of thinking. Such a mindset assumes: "If I keep the commandments, then God is obligated to reward me—with blessings, happiness, health, prosperity, and ultimately with heaven itself."

The young man has inherited this way of thinking from his religious environment. Yet he possesses a genuine spiritual uneasiness. Something about this entire religious framework does not seem right to him. And it is precisely this fragile structure that Christ comes to dismantle. The Lord does not argue with him by saying, "Even if you think you keep all the commandments, you really do not." He could have pointed out that the young man faithfully observed all the Pharisaic regulations concerning fasting, ritual purifications, and outward religious practices, while still falling short of the commandment of love. For if he truly fulfilled the commandment of love, he could not continue living in luxury while his neighbours lacked even the necessities of life.

Yet Christ does not reject him. He does not rebuke or condemn him. Instead, He tells him, in effect, "Everything you are doing is good—but it is not yet perfection. You are on the right path, but you still fall short of what is complete." True perfection, Christ explains, means freeing oneself from attachment to wealth, bodily comforts, and earthly dependencies, and following God wholeheartedly. This is the highest degree of virtue according to Christ. Even for us, who call ourselves Christians, these

words sound almost impossible. Were it not for the examples of the saints within the Church, who fulfilled this commandment literally and completely, we might think that Christ was speaking only symbolically or metaphorically. Yet He meant exactly what He said. Most of us are deeply attached to the concerns of this life, and it is exceedingly difficult to free ourselves from them.

The rich young man thinks in exactly the same way. According to the prevailing Jewish understanding, he believes that God has blessed him with wealth and comfort because he is righteous. But in a single moment Christ shatters this illusion. Perfection means spending oneself for the sake of others, not living in self-sufficiency while remaining indifferent to another person's need. The young man leaves sorrowful, deeply troubled and certainly thoughtful after hearing Christ's answer. He is very wealthy, and the thought of selling everything and embracing poverty is beyond what he can bear. The Gospel does not tell us what became of him afterward. Perhaps later he did obey Christ's command. Perhaps he remained throughout his life a restless seeker of the truth. Or perhaps he turned entirely toward his wealth and forgot God. We simply do not know.

What we do know is that the Lord's declaration remains forever relevant, judging not only the rich young man but also our own choices: "It is easier for a thick rope made from camel's hair to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God." Yet Christ also reminds us that the final word belongs to the mercy of God, for with God even what is impossible becomes possible. Amen.