

Commentary on a Section of the Gospel Reading for the Third Sunday of St. Matthew

by St. Ignaty Brianchaninov*



The Lord commanded that we guard our mind. Most people are unaware of the existence, importance, and necessity of this commandment: “The light of the body is the eye. If, therefore, thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness” (St. Matthew 6:22-23).

Christ, here, calls the mind an “eye,” since the mind is truly the eye of our soul. Our way of life and conduct he calls our “body.” Our way of life depends on our way of thinking—on the way our mind works. Thus, our way of life is healthy when our mind is also healthy; that is, when our mind follows the truth with unconditionality and simplicity, without accepting or appropriating the slightest element of falsehood.

In other words, the mind is only healthy when, with the help and energy of the Holy Spirit, it unconditionally and steadfastly follows the teaching of Christ. Any deviation, whether small or great, from the teaching of Christ reveals the sickness, slight or serious, of a mind that has lost simplicity and accepted complexity.

Complete departure of the mind from the teaching of Christ spells its death. In this case, the “lamp” is extinguished and the light is transformed into darkness.

A person’s conduct depends wholly on the condition of his mind: If his mind is healthy, his conduct is in complete accordance with God’s Will. If his mind has been more or less influenced by falsehood—that is, by evil—then his conduct is partly in accordance and partly at variance with God’s Will. Finally, if his mind has rejected the teaching of Christ and has been darkened by the acceptance of some false teaching, his conduct becomes entirely improper and unseemly. “If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!” (St. Matthew 6:23).

The Lord has forbidden us from becoming enslaved to mammon. “No man can serve two masters.... Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (St. Matthew 6:24).

He also forbade vain cares, for these weaken and suppress good concern for the acquisition of the Kingdom of Heaven. Vain cares are nothing other than sickness of soul and bear witness to its lack of faith. For this reason, the Lord said: “O ye of little faith, take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, nor yet for your body...” (St. Matthew 6:30, 25).

Hate sloth, which is detestable to God, and love toil, which is dear to God, but do not harm your soul with vain, useless, and unnecessary cares. In order that you might be steadfastly dedicated with fervent zeal to the work of your salvation, the Lord has promised to grant you everything you need in this transitory life, through His omnipotent Divine Providence (St. Matthew 6:33).

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