

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

What is true wealth? What are true riches? The “mega millions” lottery jackpot was \$1.5 billion. Powerball was \$680 million. And to the fallen flesh, that seems like the answer to all your troubles. No more bills, no more work, no more stress.

Most of us have closed our eyes and imagined ourselves the winner, thought about what we would do with the money, which things we would buy, where we would live, what we would drive, what we would wear, how impressed others would be with us. Just publicizing the amount of the jackpot raises these lustful thoughts in us. The flesh rises to such temptation. And the devil knows it.

St. Matthew writes “Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, “All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me.” The devil offered Christ the biggest jackpot of all times. It was, of course, a lie. He could never deliver. It would never have brought happiness. It would never have brought salvation. It was temptation, temptation that you too have felt. Thanks be to God, the Lord rebuked the devil with the Word of God. True wealth is not found in things that rust and spoil.

So what is true wealth? What are true riches? Wisdom. But not an earthly wisdom acquired through years of street smarts or multiple degrees. True Wisdom is a Divine Wisdom, a Wisdom from above, a Wisdom that surpasses all earthly understanding. Solomon, one of the richest men in the history of the world, writes that Wisdom is better than rubies, that all the things one may desire cannot be compared to Wisdom. The fruit of Wisdom is better than gold, the revenue of Wisdom better than choice silver.

So in a real way you are presented with a choice: hedonism for a few years of earthly wealth; or eternal riches that never end. But the riches of heaven don’t make earthly headlines. You can’t buy a ticket to win Divine Wisdom in a party store. And while many close their eyes and imagine living off of a \$1.5 billion jackpot, few men close their eyes and long rather for eternity with God in heaven. Perhaps you have been among the many, rather than the few. By your sins you have confessed that you have been among the many.

Buckets of money seem a lot more attractive to fallen men than a humble faith in God. You already know that the love of money is the root of all evil. And you heard this day that prudence, knowledge and discretion are from true Wisdom, Divine Wisdom. Pride, arrogance, an evil way, a perverse mouth are impossible for true Wisdom. But consider the conduct and language of those campaigning for office, and that of their zealous followers. Slander and accusations fly, and even violence.

The Apostle writes concerning those who walk in the ways of the fallen world. Their “end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame – who set their mind on earthly things.” For to set your mind on jackpots and earthly wealth, on political power and fame, is to allow the temporal to displace the eternal. At its base it is to forsake God. Just as the

love of money is the root of all evil, so are fallen pride and arrogance and hubris and hatred the attitude of an enemy of the cross of Christ.

What is true wealth? The Lord of the Church uses a coin to teach of true wealth. He teaches that true wealth is not found in coins. He uses the coin of the tax money of Caesar. And by His teaching He teaches you to trust in riches that never perish or fail. By His teaching He offers you Divine Wisdom. By His teaching He offers you eternal life.

The tax coin bore Caesar's image. And it was inscribed with Caesar's name. And in that inscription Caesar was often identified as a god, something that Caesar himself demanded. He desired what the devil promised the Christ – all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And according to Caesar's law, to perpetuate his lust for power and money, his subjects were taxed.

The Lord does not break Caesar's law. He directs the tax to be paid. "Render therefore unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's...", the Lord teaches. Frankly, in that they had no choice. They were compelled to pay. But the Lord's Words were not finished – "and to God the things that are God's."

If you can hear it, it is in that rendering that true wealth is found. To give to Caesar what is Caesar's makes a man poorer. But to give to God what is due God makes one rich unto eternity. For that is only possible by faith. Only faith, saving faith, ascribes all power, honor, glory, riches and might to God alone. And that is done only by true Wisdom. For Wisdom Himself promises "I traverse the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of justice, that I may cause those who love me to inherit wealth, that I may fill their treasuries."

And that happens, dear Christian, when you believe what Wisdom says next: "The Lord possessed me at the beginning of His way, before His works of old." Christ is the Wisdom of God. Christ is the Image of God. The Son, begotten of the Father before all things, the Eternal Word, is the Wisdom who speaks in the Proverb. His are counsel and sound wisdom, understanding and strength. And yet incarnate, He had not where to lay His head.

His was the cross, the implement of the unbelief of His enemies, the weapon of those who hated Him. He spurned the pinnacle of the Temple to be raised up on the cross. He refused earthly grandeur to be buried in a borrowed tomb. His image was marred. His inscription was "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews".

He rendered unto God what God was due for the sins of the world, for your sins. He paid for your lust and pride and jealousy and arrogance. In Christ you are forgiven. And in His miraculous resurrection, He won life for you, life that cannot be taken away. In Him are true riches – forgiveness and righteousness.

It is in Him that your image and inscription are made new. For in holy baptism, where Christ's forgiveness and righteousness are made yours, you are filled with the Spirit of the Living God, and the image of God lost in the fall is restored in you. His Holy Name, the Name of the Triune God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is inscribed upon you as you are made His child. So you have His image and inscription, and are rightly rendered unto Him. You have eternal salvation, and as Solomon writes, "...all things that one may desire cannot be compared" to it.

So it is you, you redeemed of Christ, you baptized into Him, you forgiven in Him, you who bear His Name and the inscription of the only True God, it is you who have citizenship in heaven, from which you eagerly await the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And to you who wait in faith for Him, to you He comes this day as He places Himself with the symbols of bread and wine for you to eat and drink. He makes His Body your Food. He makes His Blood your drink, as the Fruit of the Cross, the Fruit of Wisdom, indeed God Himself, the God whose image and inscription you bear, is rendered unto you.

So you receive Christ, whose Fruit is better than rubies, better than gold, yea than fine gold, better than choice silver. For in Him you receive righteousness. You receive wisdom. You are placed on the path of justice, that the God who loves you cause you to inherit heavenly treasure.

And soon, your Lord, Wisdom, God the Son, the incarnate, the Eternal Word, the crucified, risen and ascended Christ, will come to you who eagerly await Him, your Savior and Lord, and He will transform your lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious Body.

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