

instead, "sell it and give it away all at once."⁵ And do not give it to those who are dissolute and prodigal, but to the poor. And come and follow Me, that is, practice every other virtue as well. For there are many who are without possessions, but have no humility; or who are humble, but are drunkards or have some other vice. This is why the Lord says: Sell, and give to the poor, and follow Me when you have taken up your cross, that is, when you have prepared yourself for death for My sake. "And he was sad at that saying and went away: for he had many possessions." The word "many" is not superfluous here, for it is not the same for those with many possessions as it is for those with few, for the fetters of many possessions are stronger and more terrible. And further, if someone has not yet grown up and is childish and frivolous in his thoughts, and has an unsettled mind, let him sell his possessions, such as his anger and his desires and all the evil things which spring from them. And let him give these things, nay, hurl them, to the demons, who are poor, being without any good thing and without the wealth of goodness which comes from God. Then let him follow Christ. For one who has cast off the wealth of his sins to the demons is he who is able to follow Christ. "Turn away from evil"⁶—this means to cast off one's wealth of wickedness to the destitute host of demons; "and do good"—this means to follow Christ and take up one's cross.

23-27. And Jesus looked round about, and saith unto His disciples, How hard it shall be for them that have riches to enter into the kingdom of God! And the disciples were astonished at His words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard it is for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. And they were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, Who then can be saved? And Jesus looking upon them saith, With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible. It is not riches that are

⁵ That this is the meaning of the Lord's words "sell" and "give" is more apparent in the Greek of St. Mark's Gospel, where the imperative forms of the verbs for "sell" and "give", *poleson* and *dos*, are in the aorist tense, which implies a single, finite action, rather than a continuous, ongoing action.

⁶ Ps. 34:14

evil. It is instead those who hold onto wealth who deserve to be accused. For one ought not to hold onto riches, that is, to keep them in one's possession, but instead one should use them for what is necessary. For, as the saying goes, riches are for use, not for safekeeping.⁷ Those who keep their riches under lock and key are those who will find it hard to enter the kingdom of God. Understand "hard" here to mean "impossible". For it is impossible for the rich man to be saved. This is clear from the example which the Lord gives, saying, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." For it is impossible for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. "Camel" means either the animal or the heavy rope used on board large ships. It is impossible for a man to be saved as long as he is rich. But with God this is possible. For Christ said, "Make friends for yourselves from the mammon of unrighteousness."⁸ Do you see how this becomes possible when we listen to God? For men it is impossible, that is, it is impossible when we think with human thoughts. Why were the disciples astonished at these words? Certainly not because they themselves were rich. It seems to me that they were agonizing for all mankind, for they had already begun to be compassionate towards all. Some are perplexed how Christ could say, "With God all things are possible."⁹ We answer that when He says "all things" He means "all things that have being". Sin does not have being, for it is without essence and substance. Moreover, sin does not come from strength, but from weakness, for the Apostle Paul says, "When we were yet without strength, Christ died."¹⁰ And again David says, "Their infirmities increased."¹¹ Therefore sin, which is weakness, is something not possible for God. But, they would say, is God not able to make what is real into something which is not real? To which we answer that God is truth. To make something real into something unreal is falsehood. How then can truth make falsehood? For it would first have to destroy its own

⁷ A play on words: the Greek word *chremata*, translated here as "riches", is derived from the verb *chraomai*, meaning "to use".

⁸ Lk. 16:9

⁹ A scholion in the Greek text adds: "Surely it is not possible for God to sin."

¹⁰ Rom. 5:6

¹¹ Ps. 15:4