

A Word to the Youth

by Saint John Maximovich

And the younger son said to his father, "*Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me*" [Luke 15:12]. The parable of the prodigal son is a most instructive lesson for youth.

We see in the prodigal son the true character of carefree youth: light mindedness, thoughtlessness, a passion for independence, in short, everything that usually characterizes the greater part of one's youth. The younger son grew up in his parents' house and having reached adolescence imagined that life at home was too restrictive. He thought that living under his father's rule and his mother's eye was unpleasant. He wanted to imitate his companions, who gave themselves up to the noisy pleasures of the world. He decided, "I am the heir of a rich estate. Would it not be better if I received my inheritance now? I could handle my wealth differently than my father does." Thus the light-minded youth was taken in by the deceitful glitter of the world's pleasures and decided to cast off the yoke of obedience and depart from his parent's home.

Today many are inspired by similar impulses, and if they do not leave their parents' house, do they not depart from the house of their Heavenly Father, from obedience to the Holy Church?

The yoke of Christ and his commandments seem difficult for immature minds. They imagine that it is not entirely necessary to follow what God and His Holy Church commands. It seems to them that they can serve both God and the world at the same time. They say, "We are already strong enough to withstand destructive temptations and attractions. We can, by ourselves, hold on to the truth and correct teachings. Allow us to improve our minds by many kinds of knowledge. Let us strengthen our wills amid temptations and pitfalls. Through experience our senses will be convinced of the foulness of vice!" Such desires are not better than the ill-considered request of the younger son to his father, "*Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me.*"

Today we have light-minded youths who cease to heed the commandments and suggestions of the Holy Church. They stop studying the Word of God and the teachings of the holy fathers, and turn their attention to the 'wisdom' of false teachers, thus ruining the better part of their lives. They go to church less frequently or attend without attention,

distracted. There is no time to be pious and practice virtues since they are too busy attending movies, going to parties, etc. In short, they give themselves up to the world more and more each day, and, finally, depart into a far country.

What is the result of such parting from the Holy Church? It is the same as the result of the prodigal son's parting from his parents' house. Light-minded youths waste their excellent energies and the talents of their soul and body very quickly, ruining for this life and eternity all the good they have done. Meanwhile there appears a mighty famine in that land -- emptiness and dissatisfaction -- a necessary result of wild pleasures. A thirst for satisfaction appears, which is even more intensified by the gratification of base passions, and which finally becomes insatiable. It frequently turns out that the unfortunate lover of the world resorts to the pursuit of that which is base and shameful in order to gratify his passions, but is still not brought to his senses, unlike the prodigal son; he does not return to the path of salvation, but completes his ruin, both temporal and eternal!

[From a pamphlet published by Archbishop John in Shanghai, Feb. 4, 1946.]