



## Inheriting Eternal Life!

### Being a Good Person

When I'm out-and-about, and people find out that I'm a priest, they often tell me that they are "spiritual" but don't, necessarily, believe in organized "religion."

Sometimes, people will tell me that they find God in nature (but which god?).

At other times, people talk about morality. "As long as I'm a good person, I think it's all good between me and God."

But the question remains: Is any of this this how one inherits eternal life?

### Elder Ieronymos

In Greece, there was an elder of Aegina named Ieronymos (died 1966).

One story recounted from his life may help us answer our question.

A well-to-do man once asked Elder Ieronymos if he has done enough to be "saved." He told the elder that he was a good man and obeyed all the commandments.

Overall, he was a god-fearing person.

Elder Ieronymos thought a moment then asked, "Do you have any servants?"

"Of course," the man replied.

"Do they obey your every command?"

"Without fail. I never have to ask twice," the man responded.

"Now," asked the elder, "do you have any children?"

"Yes, I do."

"Do *they* obey your every command?"

The man laughed a bit. "They're my beloved children and, like many children, they know they can get away with a little mischief!"

The elder grinned and asked one final question, "When you die, who inherits? Or servants who obey your every command, or your children?"



## The Children Inherit

The answer, of course, is that children inherit when a parent dies.

As Orthodox Christians, we believe the same is true of inheriting *eternal life*. We have to become a child of God, which means being born by the water and the Spirit.

Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” (John 3:5 RSV)

Being “born” of the water and spirit is baptism and chrismation, a beautiful service in the Orthodox Church. This is the means by which we are united to Christ, receive the Holy Spirit, and thus are “adopted” as children of God.

St. Paul elaborates for us:

For all who are led by the Spirit of God [by being reborn through baptism as Jesus said above] are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. (Romans 8:14-17 RSV)

Yes, we should strive to live by God’s commandments and live a virtuous life, but salvation is matter of being born again so as to become a child of God. A virtuous life is our response to God’s free gift of paradise.

Short of being reborn as a child of God, we’re only a mere servant.