

28th Sunday in Ordinary Time Yr. B

The rich man in Mark's Gospel (Matthew tells us he was also a young man) must have perceived that there was more to Jesus than meets the eye – something exceptional about him. He ran up, knelt before Jesus asking 'Good master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?' (10:17) In the Old Testament



(and in First Century Judaism) was the popular idea that wealth and possessions were signs of divine blessing. In spite of his wealth and youth, he felt there was something still lacking in his heart which made him sad. He's struggling to be a better person, hoping Jesus had the answer he sought.

Jesus first questions the man for calling him "good" as that applies to God alone. Jesus is neither denying that he himself was "good" nor denying his divinity, but posing a question that invites the man beyond the appearances of just another good teacher among many. It will be **a challenge to the man** to see that Jesus is indeed the one God who is good and just, who has come to the world as man to give salvation to his people. (CCC 2544-2546, 2728)

Jesus then tells the man to keep the commandments – specifically those referring to love of neighbour. He is disappointed by Jesus' answer since he already does that, indeed has from his youth. Jesus was filled with love for the man, for keeping the commandments is good and necessary, but only as part of something more, viz., detachment from worldly goods in spiritual poverty and discipleship. To see that truth is to have true wisdom, as in the first reading where Wisdom is personified as a woman: 'And so I prayed ... In her company all good things came to me, and at her hands incalculable wealth' (Wis 7:7, 11) – and 'Teach us to count up the days that are ours, and we shall come to the heart of wisdom.' (Ps 90:12)

What makes us Christian is following Christ, not moral law which, although necessary, is a secondary consequence of the primacy of personal relationship with Christ. It is our personal response to God who loves us first and takes us to the heart of the gospel. The man was not ready for that, and went away sad for he had a blind spot, namely, attachment to his personal wealth – and Jesus saw that. God has given us the gifts of creation, and things of this world to help us fulfill our purpose of sharing in God's life and love. When these get in the way then it's time to let them go. (CCC 2547)

The disciples too were astounded when Jesus said to them: 'How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God ... It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle' ... then 'who can be saved' they ask, for such a thing is impossible. And so it is by human resources only. Jesus is using hyperbole, an exaggerated image to drive home an

important point about the gravity and danger of sin. We saw similar in an earlier Sunday gospel about cutting off body parts that were occasions of sin. (Mk 9:43-47)

Thankfully, for God everything is possible because Jesus, who is God incarnate, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity who did the Father's will and sacrificed himself totally – giving everything he had, even his life, so that we can be saved and inherit eternal life – all because he loves us. This is the supreme **gift of God's grace**, for we could never earn salvation by ourselves by doing all the right things so that somehow God owes us. The Church called out that **heresy of Pelagius** who, in the 5th century, denied the doctrine of original sin, holding that the human tendency to sin is a free choice. According to his line of reasoning, there is no need for God's intervening grace because people only need to make up their minds to do God's will. 'It was due to the intervention of St. Augustine and the Church that greater clearness was gradually reached in the disputed questions and that the first impulse was given towards a more careful development of the dogmas of original sin and grace.' (<https://bit.ly/3mnwhBi>)

Our second reading from the letter to the Hebrews metaphorically describes the word of God as: 'any two-edged sword: it can seek out the place where soul is divided from spirit, or joints from marrow.' (4:12) (CCC 367) The Word of God, incarnated in Sacred scripture, conquers and transforms hearts that humbly receive it. It is no dead letter. When we read the Word of God, we're encountering the person of Christ. If we read Scripture with an open heart, we're actually encountering the inspired Word, who comes to us through the living Word of God, integrating it into our daily lives and leading to holiness and eternal life. (CCC 105-108, 2562) 'May your grace, O Lord, we pray, always go before us and follow after and make us always determined to carry out good works.' (Collect of today's Mass)

In his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel) I #7, Pope Francis writes: "I never tire of repeating those words of Benedict XVI which take us to the very heart of the gospel: 'Being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.'" (<https://bit.ly/3FcNtC5>)

Let us close with words of wisdom from St. Teresa of Avila: "Remember that you have only one soul; that you have only one death to die; that you have only one life, which is short and has to be lived by you alone; and there is only one Glory, which is eternal. If you do this, there will be many things about which you care nothing. "

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