

TWENTY-EIGHTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Gospel: Mark 10:17-30

As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honour your father and mother.'"

He said to him, "Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth." Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions. Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." They were greatly astounded and said to one another, "Then who can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible."

Peter began to say to him, "Look, we have left everything and followed you." Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life."

REFLECTION 1: **YOU WILL HAVE TREASURE IN HEAVEN**

One of the delightful scenes from the musical 'Fiddler on the Roof' begins with Tevye talking to God. He says to the Almighty; 'O Dear Lord, you made many poor people. I realise of course that it is no shame to be poor, but it's not a great honour either. So, what would be wrong if I had a little fortune?' Then he begins to sing and dance his dream of how life would be 'if I were a rich man?' - there's the house he could build, the clothes his wife would wear and the respect he would win in the community.

Perhaps at one time or another every one of us has had a similar dream - winning the Lotto, not having to worry about bills, mortgages or whatever. Yes, it's a lovely thought, but we should keep in mind that money has its own inventory of problems. In today's Gospel (Mark 10: 17-30) Jesus talked about the perils of prosperity. He said that it was easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God. Local guides tell pilgrims to Jerusalem that Jesus was referring here to a certain low archway in the walls of David's city that made it exceedingly difficult for camels to pass through and known in Jesus' day as 'the eye of the needle'. We know that Jesus was not well off. He once remarked that he had 'no place to lay down his head'. He and his disciples must often have slept out at night in the open, which in balmy weather would have been tolerable. We also know that Jesus had just been talking to a young man who is described in the Gospel as having many possessions. Without realising it, this man is in a good state, but he still lacks something - loving God to the exclusion of all idols. This was the essence of the first tablet of the law and this was still lacking, but when he heard the price, it was more than what he was prepared to pay, and he went away, we are told, 'very sad'. To go and sell all his possessions and give the money to the poor and then to follow this itinerant prophet was not on.

This encounter shocked his disciples and perhaps we too were taken aback. To go and sell all seemed a bit harsh, when perhaps today we might urge such a well-off young man to 'go, invest his money' and he'd have a fine pension for himself in later years. Riches to the disciples and the people of Jesus' day were regarded as a sign of divine favour. We often hear about poverty and the effects it can have on those afflicted, but we would do well also to heed what Jesus has to say about prosperity.

You and I may not regard ourselves as rich, but we live in a culture that is somewhat obsessed with the material side of life. Success today has become only one thing - money. So, we may very well ask what it is about money, the desire for it, and the love of it that causes such deep concern in the compassionate heart of the Saviour?

Well, prosperity can create an illusion and keep us from seeing ourselves as we really are. A rich person has standing and rank in the community. They are treated with deference, they can receive concessions, and they have what we term 'access'. They don't have to wait in queues and voices within suggest to them that they are a cut above the common lot. Yet all the while, prosperity may only be window dressing and says nothing about the person one really is. Bob Geldof remarked that the bulk of the millions donated each year by the Irish people to alleviate starvation and provide infrastructure for projects in the Third World, do not come from the coffers of the rich, but the Euro and cent of ordinary folk.

Money is a powerful force, but it can pose an obstacle to one's entry into God's kingdom. The secret millionaires who present themselves in documentaries on our TV screens, may have unlocked the secret of having a 'little fortune' and disbursing it on worthy causes before the curtain on their lives comes to a close.

REFLECTION 2: 'WITH GOD ALL IS POSSIBLE'

Glancing over the advertising pages in your newspaper, supposing your eyes settled on an advertisement, like this; 'Authentic disciples who wish to follow Jesus Christ required. Apply to St Peter giving full details and submitting a valid CV.' If you were tempted to go for it what do you think that CV should contain? Well, the outline for such is noted in today's Gospel (Mk. 10: 17-30) 'This is to certify that N.N. loves his/her enemies, prays for his/her persecutors, offers no resistance to injury. He/she gives alms without question and all assets are invested in heaven, allows the needy to borrow without return, forgives without limit, sells and gives the proceeds to the poor, repents and believes the good news'. As we listen to today's Gospel we can sense that Jesus' disciples were taken back by the challenge he presented to the man with many possessions'. That surprise was even greater when Jesus told them how difficult it is for the rich to enter God's kingdom. Theirs was a world where riches were regarded as a blessing from God for the just and upright. Wealth offered security and a sense of wellbeing. But Jesus was inviting those who would be his own to find the basis for their security and wellbeing not in possessing riches or possessions but in him. Could they do that? Did they want to do that? The dismay of the disciples is clearly reflected in their question to Jesus: 'Then, who can be saved?'

The point is that the disciples and the man who went away sad were focusing on themselves, and on their efforts and accomplishments instead of looking to God and his grace, 'For human beings it is impossible – all things are possible to God.' Every challenge, every demand Jesus places upon his disciples becomes possible, if by faith, the disciples have learned to rely on the grace of God and approach each challenge as an opportunity to respond to His will.

In the prayer traditionally attributed to Solomon in our first reading (Wisdom 7: 7-11) we learn that he realized the importance of God and wisdom above all things in life. Solomon prayed not for wealth or for an extended and prosperous reign but for the gifts that would make him a better person. The spiritual posture with which Solomon came before the Lord can be an example for all who rely on God. He

addressed God without 'a shopping list' open to his will and his ways. Perhaps Solomon had been allowed a glimpse into the mystery celebrated by the Hebrew author in today's second reading; 'God's word is living and effective...able to discern reflections and thoughts of the heart.' (Heb 4: 12-13) This is the God made known to us in Jesus whose grace makes possible a positive response to his seemingly impossible demands.

There is just one detail in today's Gospel that begs our attention. Mark tells us that when the rich man came to Jesus with his question, 'Jesus looked at him and loved him'. Jesus is our Friend, our Brother, our Teacher, who looks on each of us with a love that strengthens and supports. Perhaps Jesus' look of love might have drawn him back. Maybe Mark's unfinished story might encourage us to be firm in following this Carpenter from the plains of Galilee who always looks on us with love.