

Homily For the 28th Sunday in Ordinary Time- Year B

St Luke Sunday Masses- October 10/11, 2015

Wisdom 7:7-11 "Gold is but sand in Wisdom's sight."

Psalm 90 "Let the favour of the Lord our God be upon us."

Hebrews 4:12-13 "The Word of God is living and active."

Mark 10:17-30 "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

Introduction

A young man who has everything walks away grieving. That's pretty heavy. Grief is an emotion usually reserved for being overwhelmed by sadness at a loss of something so great that one could not imagine even the possibility of happiness without it. Before that, though, we see a completely different picture of what he is like. The same rich young man:

Runs up to Jesus ... he is excited at meeting the famous healer and teacher.

He kneels before him ... an act of worship. We will do that in a few minutes.

Calls him Good Teacher ... Doesn't that imply respect for wisdom and authority?

Asks about eternal life ... Hey, he seems to know what is important.

Has kept the commandments his whole life ... he is an observant and moral Jew.

But for some reason, those things aren't good enough for him to get an A on the test. It seems like he didn't even pass. Why is that? Well, that is what we have to figure out. It obviously has something to do with being rich, or does it?

On Riches in Scripture

Jesus never condemns the rich. Nowhere in scripture is there such a condemnation. There is, however, a warning against certain dangers of having wealth of any kind.

The psalmist admonishes: If riches increase, set not your heart on them. The delight in riches chokes the Word."

Solomon tells us that gold is but sand compared to the spiritual wealth that is offered by Wisdom, a manifestation of God's presence. A wise person is one who is at peace with God, knows God and spends time with God.

It's such a strong temptation, isn't it? That desire for wealth. The necessary awareness of internal and spiritual poverty is often overlooked. V 12 of the psalm is a prayer asking God for help to use time wisely in order to make the best use of a fleeting life.

Elsewhere, Saint Paul explains to Timothy, the priest of the Church at Ephesus: Tell those who are rich in this world's goods not to be proud, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches. Let them trust in the God who provides us richly with all things for our use and enjoyment. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share. Thus, they will build a secure foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life. (1 Tim 6: 17-19) And life is the question about which the young man asks.

Explication

As Christians, we look to Jesus, of course, when we want to understand what is good, what is true, what is beautiful. Jesus rejects the compliment "good" from the young man. The law is good. Creation is good. But no man is absolutely good. Only God is good. But we might start to perceive that Jesus wants the man to come to a deeper sense of what is truly good.

He looked at him and loved him. He knows his heart. As the writer of Hebrews says, the Word of God, which is Jesus, is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Before God no creature is hidden, and all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account.

Jesus saw great possibility in a man who was concerned to keep the commandments and to have eternal life, and so he issues the same call to him that earlier disciples received. Leave behind what you have and what you are doing and come follow me.

Jesus looked at him and loved him but he went away sorrowful. He seemed to become aware of his attachment to his possessions, and grief took over. Jesus asked him to go one step further than he had done. This is how God works with us. He takes us where we are, then invites us to go further, or to come closer to himself. Does it have to be so radical, though?

The rest of the disciples, even though they made a radical choice to follow Jesus, were still shocked to hear that the rich have no advantage when it comes to dealings with God. Jesus says all this counts for nothing with God. "Then who can be saved?" The answer comes: No One. On the other hand, a radical conversion to the Good God can make it possible. But, first:

1. Sell everything
2. Give the money to the poor
3. Follow Jesus

Fulfilment in Jesus

The key is around what is good. Jesus affirms the commandments as the basis for moral behaviour but, it seems, only part of the basis for entry into eternal life. There is more. We think it is about Jesus teaching US a lesson about not depending on our material attachments, and it is. But, even more importantly, it is actually about who IS Jesus. And who is he? "Follow me" only makes sense if Jesus is, indeed, not just good but THE good. He is the way to salvation; he is the ultimate good for which the young man is searching. "No one is good," that is, no human being. In other words. Jesus invites the young man to recognize the mystery of divinity that he has unknowingly hinted at by addressing Jesus as "good teacher".

Jesus doesn't force his divine identity. He wants us to come to faith, he wants us to come to trust him. Ultimately the only reason we would ever give up everything and follow Jesus is

because he is in fact who, through what we call the incarnation, has become man lived among us as our Savior and as our Messiah.

The challenge for us, as it is frequently, is to let go of whatever attachments keep us from joining ourselves to Christ, to the one who is the perfect good, and in whom we will attain our perfection, our joy, our life. Did the young man grieve because he was so attached to his wealth or did he grieve because he wasn't ready to trust the one who is the path to life, the one who IS goodness itself.

Examples of Right Priorities

In May 2001, a journalist interviewed the elderly South African Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who said to him, "If this is going to be my last interview, let us talk about prayer and adoration, about faith, hope and forgiveness." A man who knew what was important.

St. Theresa of Calcutta had already committed herself to a consecrated life, but wanted to serve the most needy, those dying in the gutters of the streets of Calcutta. One priest who visited her sisters reports that he saw her bringing a man in the worst condition, almost dead, in her arms to the convent saying quietly over and over "O, my Jesus, O my Jesus, welcome to my home. Sell everything, give to the poor, follow Jesus.

St. Paul asked to be freed from a "thorn in the flesh." The answer Jesus gave to him? "My grace is enough for you" Depend on Jesus. Follow Jesus. He is enough.

Call To Action

The Good News today invites us to trust Jesus to give us something which meets us where we are and tells us God loves us exactly the way we are:

- not because we are so wonderful
- not because we deserve it
- not because we have a right to it

but he loves us too much to let us stay the way we are and so looks at us and loves us and gently says:

- let go ... let go of what you have ...
- let go of what you think is impossible to do without.

Does it have to be as radical as what Jesus asked the rich young man? That's a good question. I want to know the answer to that. Well, we have great examples from saints who encourage us to take small steps towards that greater goal. Fr. Solanus Casey was an Irish priest in Detroit, now being considered for canonization. Because he didn't speak the main language of the other priests at the monastery, they thought he was not very bright, so they gave him one of the lowest jobs, being the doorman to greet the public. In a few years, people began to come in

droves. They wanted to meet 'the holy priest'. Fr. Casey had the gift of discerning peoples' hearts and what they needed to let go of and how they could follow Jesus. He would say:

If they pray several times a week ... Could you pray every day?

If they say the rosary on feast days ... Could you pray the rosary twice a week?

If they go to mass two Sundays a month ... Could you go three times a month?

If they go to weekday mass once in awhile ... Could you go every week?

If they give \$100 a month to the ministry of the Church ... could you make it \$150.

So there is a way that takes us, by little steps, towards Jesus. Consider these three as a general approach:

1. First change the direction I am facing. What's my path. Where am I looking for fulfilment, for satisfaction. Do I need to stop getting my news and ideas from the world through CBC and CNN, and turn to the bible for the Good News? What draws my attention. I can't fall down on my knees in front of Jesus unless I am facing him. Only then can I ask him: Lord of goodness, what must I do to have eternal life.
2. Second, recognize that everything we have and are belongs to God and comes from God. If we live that way we will never feel afraid of losing something precious because it is not ours to begin with. And, God will give us what is truly precious when we have lost sight of it for ourselves.
3. Seek to know Jesus' answer to major questions of existence - the spiritual questions. The questions of eternal life. Address him personally. He will not turn you away. He will look at you and love you. But, know this, he will also ask you to follow him.