

Trinity XX – Ordinary Sunday 28B

“Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal Life?” Is the question placed before us today, in our Gospel from Mark 10. St Mark paints a vivid scene of a rich man meeting Jesus on the road to Jerusalem. This eager young man has been a law-abiding Jew from his earliest years. He tells Jesus that he has kept the 10 commandments from his youth. How many of us can say that? There is something absolutely right about this young man, something spiritually alive, something religiously authentic. He is a humble man, despite his wealth he knelt before Jesus and called him with respect, Good Master, what must I do?

Clearly, something is missing in this man’s faith. While he has observed the commandments from his youth, he is not convinced that he is on the right path to eternal life. Thus he asks the question, what must I do to inherit eternal life? Initially, Jesus gave him the standard rabbinical answer – Keep the commandments and you will have life. The 10 commandments are a blueprint for how Israel must live in righteousness in order to be God’s people. Nevertheless, the young man is not satisfied with the mere observance of the commandments, he is spiritually hungry, years of law-keeping hasn’t fulfilled his thirst for God, he is a seeker, and he is enthusiastic about finding the deeper truths of God and his kingdom.

At times we Christians can develop a certain complacency in our spiritual life. Particularly, if we have grown up Christian, and have

observed the commandments and practised faith for a long time. If that relates to us, we should learn from this young man who seeks answers from Jesus in his ongoing spiritual quest and thirst. Let us not be complacent in our journey of faith, but be eager, enthusiastic and open to new possibilities.

Seeing his eagerness and honesty, we are told that Jesus looked on this rich man with love; and desired this blameless enthusiast to become one of his disciples. So the challenge is made: *“There is one thing you lack. Go and sell everything you own and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven, then come, follow me”*

Where before, he fell on his knees before the person of Jesus, now his face falls at the words of Jesus. He says nothing, The cost of discipleship is way too much. He turns and goes away, sad and disappointed, to return to the wealth that holds him from being a disciple of Jesus. Jesus’ demand is too radical and his answer is too costly.

Countless number of men and women, throughout the centuries have taken these words of Jesus literally and given all they have to the poor and followed him as a missionary, or a religious monk or a nun, sister, in one of the countless religious orders within the Church and still continue to do so, and that’s a valid interpretation of this scripture.

However, for most Christians including many of us, we are not called to a literal interpretation of giving everything away to the poor. What is at the heart of this scripture is a call to radical dependence on God; in our discipleship, and to reflect on what prevents us from following Jesus more closely. What are we asked to let go, and need to give away, in order to follow Jesus closely?

At the time of Jesus, being a wealthy person was seen as a sign of God's favour, a reward for being a righteous person. Jesus' teaching here is a challenge to that attitude. This is why when Jesus said, "*It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God,*" The disciples were exceedingly astonished and said to him **"Then who can be saved?"**

It was news to them that the poor can be saved! Christ's teaching changed this Jewish understanding of the relationship between wealth and blessings – If you are wealthy you are blessed, not in Jesus' book. This is now picked up by the preachers of the prosperous Gospel, who believes the more wealthy you are the more blessed you are from God – wrong.

The Church upholds the right to own private property, but that right comes with a responsibility to share our wealth with those who do not have the basic necessities of life, hence the call to charity and generosity.

We live in a society which measures success in terms of economic growth and security, a society which rewards the rich with more riches. The danger is that our own values can centre on power, profit, and property. If we are what we are devoted to, our real identity is revealed by what we worship. We can all become the devoted disciples of consumerism, powered by desires that will be never satisfied.

Have you ever really wanted something but were unable to take the steps needed to achieve it?

Was this by choice or necessity? How much was this due to fear of letting go of something?

How are we called to live in this modern age in order to inherit eternal life?

The Gospel asks us to pause and reflect about this matter, to look at ourselves critically in the light of Jesus' values. What is the Holy Spirit inviting us to do as the next step to become a radical disciple of Jesus?

What is he asking us to let go? He might not be asking us to sell all we have and give it to the poor, but he is always inviting each of us, his disciples to a closer walk with him – guaranteed. We should not let any attachment we entertain to come between what God desires for us.

If we are possessed by any attachment, we are no longer free to accept the invitation of Jesus. Attachment to anything created can steal our freedom to choose.

Jesus wants us to enjoy an inner independence, so that who we are is not dependent on what we have. Jesus' disciples are identified by their relationship with him and by their relationship with their neighbour. Detachment from possessions frees the disciple to pay attention to others, and Jesus says that in doing so, the disciple will have a whole host of "brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and land". This has been my experience to some extent. Attempting to follow Jesus in the religious life and priesthood has helped me develop so many wonderful friendships all around the country, and continues to do so.

When the rich young man left Jesus he returned to his possessions; if he had become a disciple he would have inherited a new family. This man without a name ended up the poorer. The spiritual life, at the highest pitch, is about giving your life away, and that is why having any worldly attachments is a problem. We are each called to "Being more, rather than having more."

Thus, our gospel highlights the tension between merely observing the law and really giving oneself totally and wholeheartedly to the way of Christ. Jesus makes the point that we need to get our priorities right. Let us not follow in the footsteps of this rich young man; if Jesus wants us to give up something let's listen to him and follow him with trust and faith. This is the highest adventure of the spiritual life, when we value what God wants for our lives. Amen.