

Homily. 28th Sunday in Ordinary Time. Year. B. 12/13 October 2024.

That Jesus looked lovingly on the rich man who wanted to know what he had to do so as to inherit eternal life is further proof if it were needed of Jesus impartiality. He happily accepted rich and poor, adults and children, men and women, Jews and non-Jewish gentiles, sinners and saints, helping, healing and guiding them all. In a time and culture given over to making many distinctions between those acceptable and those not, Jesus lived and modelled a very different style of welcome and openness.

The story of the rich man, a sincere seeker of truth, goodness and the way to fullness of life is also a strong testament to Jesus respect for each persons freedom of will. When he told the man what he lacked in his search, what he'd need to let go and leave behind him, his attachment to wealth and the security it offered, he accepted that the man could say no, which the story tells us he did, walking away sad. Jesus didn't go chasing after him, nor did he implore him to reconsider or try to entice the man back by watering down what he'd said. Rather, respecting the man's own intelligence and freedom of choice, Jesus let him go his way. He knew that you can lead people to water but you can't force them to drink.

He understood that the man's honest search would leave other times and openings for God to act. As Jesus said this to his disciples, for human beings this may seem impossible, but everything is possible to God, but once again they just didn't get it. This was because they equated wealth with status, power and reward from God for following the commandments. Jesus wasn't so naive, being wiser to the many causes of life's injustices.

We understand, Christ's resurrection behind us and with the benefit of centuries of lived experience and reflection, that Jesus is the Word of God, present, living and active in human history, around us and through us. The Letter to the Hebrews richly makes this point, stressing that nothing is hidden from God's wise Word, that no one beyond his reach and influence. Jesus perfectly combines in our humanity the feminine wise, insightful Spirit and the masculine sharp, effective Word.

In St. Mark's story we witness Jesus revealing both his wisdom and his clarity, caring insight and effective teaching, in his dealing with the rich man's search and his disciple's astonishment at what he said; That the way to life isn't earned or inherited, rather it's discovered by letting go; That wealth isn't a sign of God's approval, rather this being found by putting God first and through lovingly serving others.

We're on a journey of discovery here, one leading us step by step through success and failure to the life that God is offering, a free gift, a grace undeserved by us. The lamp that lights our way on our search is faith; the bright warmth of her, the wise Spirit and the sharp burning flame of him, the living Word with us, now and until the end of time.