

Homily. 28th Sunday in Ordinary Time. Year. B. 9/10 October 2021.

Most of us would say that there wasn't much wrong with the man in the gospel story, and we'd be mostly right. He was a good, law abiding citizen fulfilling all of his civic and religious duties and obligations from his youth. Yes, he happened to be rich, but there nothing wrong in that either. Even Jesus recognised this man's goodness when, as St. Mark says, He looked at him and loved him. Jesus plainly saw the man's sincerity in his search for eternal life, but Jesus also saw something more. He saw what was blocking the man from letting go and letting God fully into his life.

It was the man's opening sentence, his initial request, that gave the game away. Remember, the man ran up, knelt before Jesus out of respect for Him saying; 'Good master, what must I do so as to inherit Eternal Life?' The rich man was used to doing things so as to get things. He approached his quest for Eternal Life with the same energy and mind-set as he had every other deal and bargain he'd ever made. For this man Eternal Life was something that one got through doing some deal or work or by inheritance won through some exchange.

Jesus well knew, and as I hope we do, this isn't the way at all that God works in matters of our eternal salvation. Quite the opposite actually. Salvation and Eternal Life aren't achieved, bought or obtained by some deal with God. Rather they are received, welcomed and lived as the undeserved free gift beyond all measure and every expectation that they are. It's was this dealing, earning and getting pattern of thinking that was blocking the otherwise good man from receiving his hearts desire.

There's nothing wrong with being rich and wealthy by inheritance or by one's just and hard work. Wealth, money and material goods are only an issue when they become the centre of our lives, making a lens through which we look at everything and everyone. St. Paul said this to us in his 1st Letter to Timothy when he wrote; 'The love of money is the root of all evil'. Having money and things aren't the concern here, but the love of them most certainly is, for they then displace God from the centre of our lives making everything and everyone into a means to our own ends.

It was the 'more' that Jesus saw in the man. It's why He challenged him to give away everything he had amassed to the poor, and then come, follow Him. It was the man's focus on his wealth, his love of its security and status and its power over him that led the man to walk sadly away from Jesus. Wealth and possessions, fairly obtained become a block when we love them above everything else, even above God. Like a camel packed and loaded too heavily we cannot enter through the gate of the needles eye. We end up choosing the hoard we're carrying over the gift that God offers; we opt to hang onto the goods we've got over the gift of Life that comes for free to minds and hearts open and ready to receive grace.

The disciples struggled with this concept, too, as we do. In the end what seems impossible to us is always possible for God who opens up way within us by one means or another to accept that everything that matters is always an undeserved gift, a freely offered grace which asks only that we be thankful to God, the gift-giver. This is why we're here now, to give thanks and praise for all of the gifts of God to us, and to ask God to help us to use them wisely and well as the love of God living within us demands.