

TWENTY-EIGHTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Wisdom 7:7-11 Hebrews 4:12-13 Mark 10:17-30

QONTAINED WITHIN THIS incident of the rich man coming to Jesus is a challenge from the Lord to all of us. The Gospel says that as Jesus was setting out on a journey, a man comes up to Him with a question. The Gospel doesn't say precisely when or where this happens. It doesn't even give us the man's name because it could be any person, any place and any time with the universal question, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" That is his question and it is our question. It is the question of every culture and of every people.

Jesus' answer is direct. Keep the commandments. The man answers that he has done that but still he wanted more, he needed more. Jesus looked at him with love and said to him, "You are lacking in one thing. Sell what you have, give to the poor then come follow Me." The man looked at Jesus; Jesus looked at him and there was a silence. Then the man left. The Gospel says, "he had many possessions."

This person lived a moral life yet felt that something was holding him back. The depth of spiritual life was eluding him because something stood in the way. Jesus spotted that "something" right away and said "You are lacking in one thing..." and the Lord knew what he lacked was freedom. He was possessed by his possessions. Those he could not give up. His wealth trapped him. "He went away sad, for he had many possessions."

Maybe when Jesus looks at us, He sees other things that stand in our way of a vibrant spiritual life. Maybe it isn't money. After all, many people are generous with their prosperity. Maybe it is lust or arrogance; maybe it is envy or a memory; maybe a wrong relationship is the one thing that keeps us from giving ourselves completely to the work of Christ.

The word of God that the Letter to the Hebrews describes

can help with a spiritual diagnosis of our soul and let God's grace do some spiritual surgery, to cut out that moral tumor that blocks our full following of Jesus. We all have something that stands in the way. The key is to identify it. Jesus did that for the rich man and God's word read and preached each week can do that for us. That's the message to us of that rich man. We all have something that stands in the way of our deeper following of Christ. For him it was his possessions; for us it may be something else.

The Lord in this Gospel reading goes on to speak about the power of money to hypnotize us and distract us from the care of our soul. Sometimes our desire to get or keep money can hold us back from doing what we know is the right thing. The accumulation of wealth can cloud our judgment. But, it can also help us serve the Lord. Money is a tool. The question is: What are we doing with it? Is it a burden to our soul or a blessing?

A meditation from a book called *Prayers* by Michel Quoist written many years ago still has power to make us reflect on what we are doing with our money. It is called "Prayer Before a Twenty Dollar Bill."

*Lord, see this bill. It frightens me.
You know its secrets, you know its history.
It will never tell all that it hides in its creases.
It will never reveal all the struggles and efforts it
represents,
The disillusionment and slighted dignity.
It is stained with sweat and blood...
It frightens me because it has death on its conscience...
All the people who killed themselves for it,
To possess it for a few hours,
To have through it a little pleasure, a little joy,
a little life...
It has offered roses to the radiant fiancée.
It has paid for the baptismal party, and fed the baby.*

*It has provided bread for the family table.
Because of it there was laughing among the young and
joy among the elders.
It has paid for the saving visit of the doctor,
It has bought the book that taught the child,
It has clothed the young girl.
But it has sent the letter breaking the engagement,
It has paid for the death of the baby in its mother's womb,
It has bought the liquor that made the drunkard,
It has produced the movie unfit for children,
And has recorded the indecent song.
It has broken the morals of the adolescent and made
the adult a thief.
It has bought for a few hours the body of a woman.
It has paid for the weapons of crime and for the wood
of the coffin.
O Lord, I offer you this bill with its joyous mysteries,
its sorrowful mysteries.
I thank you for all the life and joy it has given.
I ask your forgiveness for the harm it has done.*

(Adapted from Prayers by Michel Quoist, Sheed and Ward, 1963)

How are we using the money we have? Is it building the Kingdom of God or blocking it? Is it liberating our soul or trapping it? Is it building up our spiritual assets or depleting them? Are we better followers of Christ because of it or in spite of it? Money is a tool. What it does to our life and to our soul is up to us.