

Homily (notes) from Canon Philip Dyson

Sunday 10th October 2021 - 28th Sunday in ordinary time

Readings (Year B): 1st: Wisdom 7:7-11 Psalm: 89. 2nd: Hebrews 4:12-13.

Gospel: Mark 10:17-30.

The rich man is a good man who is seeking eternal life. He appears well motivated, follows the law faithfully and keeps the commandments. It is clearly a genuine and deeply felt question, full of expectation as he greets Jesus and talks to him. Jesus looks at him steadily and with love, but the man departs with his face downcast and feeling sad. How disappointing he must have been.

Outwardly the man has kept all the rules and done what he feels has been asked of him. But Jesus knows that inwardly the man's heart is set, not on God, but on money and wealth. And the man cannot give it up, even for God. Jesus tells him that in order to follow him, it is necessary to make an incredibly difficult choice – either to see his money as his security, or to trust in God. Like the parable of the fool and his barns, the man has not been able to see that everything he has is given to him as a gift from God.

Instead of responding to God's generosity by being generous himself, and sharing what he has, he holds on to what he has got. His treasure is a collection of material goods, not the treasures of faith, love and wisdom. And as we all know, there are no pockets in shrouds.

Jesus gives us many reminders of the dangers of wealth in his parables because the call of money, status and security is so attractive and alluring that it can easily take our minds and hearts away from God, and make us selfish and unloving, hoarding instead of generous. St Paul reminds in his 1st letter to Timothy: The love of money is the root of all evils.

Jesus does not condemn wealth: money in itself is neither good nor bad. It can be hoarded for selfish use, it can be spent excessively and showily for status reasons, or it can be shared with those who have less than we do. What we decide to do with what we have is one way of telling where our heart truly lies. Hence our first reading Wisdom is the gift from God which enables us to keep a right perspective on life.

Jesus asks the rich young man to not only help the poor but *become* poor. To find the treasure of heaven by giving up the treasure of earth.

Jesus asks us to put aside what is keeping us from God in order to fully engage with those in need.

The whole episode is about discipleship. It asks everybody the question: are you willing to let go of anything which holds you back from Christ's way? As today's Psalm says: 'Make us know the shortness of our life that we may gain wisdom of heart.' Or Thomas a Kempis: 'For a small reward many will hurry away on a long journey, while for eternal life many will hardly take a single step.'

Canon Philip Dyson

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