Dear Friends,

The readings today really hit us to the core of our lives. They ask us to consider where we find meaning in life. The second reading from Hebrews 4 says that the Word of God is a two-edged sword, by that it means one that is very sharp and very strong. It cuts into us and uncovers the thoughts, reflections, and desires of our hearts.

We read in the Gospels of so many people meeting Jesus and going away completely transformed. So many people who met Jesus were healed of illnesses, found meaning and went away totally different persons. Many people who met Jesus went away happy. But in the Gospel today a man meets Jesus and goes away sad (Mark 10:22). It is the only time in all the Gospels that someone who was called by Jesus went away sad. This meeting between the man and Jesus showed such promise and yet ended so badly.

The disturbing thing is that we can see aspects of ourselves in this man also which begs the question, “are we going away sad or happy when we meet Jesus in the many ways in which we meet him?”

Let’s look at some of the things we may have in common with the man.

- The man was a spiritual person. He asked Jesus what he should do to inherit eternal life. He was genuinely interested in growing closer to God. He had kept all the commandments from his youth. Like this man we are also searching to come closer to God and we want to inherit eternal life.

- Jesus looked steadily at the man and was filled with love for him. Some scholars believe that Mark intends us to understand that Jesus embraced or hugged the man. We know that Jesus loves each of us also. Jesus appreciates our efforts to discern his will and leave sin behind and live a new life of grace.

- The man was already living a very good life, but Jesus had much more in mind for him. Jesus knew that he could achieve even greater heights of holiness, so Jesus invited him to raise his goal, “You are lacking in one thing.” (Mark 10:21) The man had all the money he needed but he was still lacking in one thing. We are all lacking in at least one thing and perhaps many things to achieve more holiness and come closer to God.

Then Jesus gave the man the challenge which he was unwilling to accept; go, sell, give, come, follow. The young man was unwilling to make this sacrifice and went away sad. Now we can see that he was not as close to God as we might at first have imagined. He was obeying all the rules, but his heart was still not focused properly on God.

The man in the Gospel is a contrast to King Solomon whom we are to understand is talking in the first reading. He says he placed wisdom which we could say is right relationship with God, before riches. Naturally the question we all have on our minds now is what does that command of Jesus to the man mean for us? Does Jesus ask us to go, sell, give, come, follow? Jesus does call some people now to radically give up everything as he called the man in today’s Gospel. We can think of all those in religious vows in the Catholic Church who take a vow of poverty. Different religious congregations take different vows, but most take the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience.

We do not have to see Jesus’ command to the man - go, sell, give, come, follow - as applying only to money. The one thing in which we are lacking may be something else. We may be lacking in some virtue. We may be proud or selfish or lustful and thus lacking in humility or compassion or purity of heart.

All of us want to be happy. All of us want to live lives of meaning. All of us want to finish our physical lives united to God. To do all this we need to keep the priorities of life straight. God and His Presence in others must be first. His love must grow. His Word must envelope the world. If we allow that to happen, God Himself will take care of the rest of our needs. Solomon said that along with wisdom, all good things came to him.

Be blessed,
Fr. Tom Kunnel C.O.

October 10, 2021

28th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
FIRST READING
I pleaded, and the spirit of wisdom came to me.
I preferred her to scepter and throne,
and deemed riches nothing in comparison with
her. (Wis 7:7-8)

PSALM
Fill us with your love, O Lord, and we will sing
for joy! (Ps 90)

SECOND READING
No creature is concealed from him,
but everything is naked and exposed
to the eyes of him
to whom we must render an account. (Heb 4:13)

GOSPEL
“Go, sell what you have, and give to the poor
and you will have treasure in heaven; then
come, follow me.” (Mk 10:21)


GOSPEL MEDITATION
Encourage Deeper Understanding of Scripture

If we are truly in love with God, then the basics are not going to be enough. That love is going to want to be expressed in going above and beyond, in leaving the comfortable and familiar, in stretching and growing, and in following a voice other than our own. St. Teresa of Calcutta rightly instructs us that for “love to be real, it must cost, it must hurt, it must empty us of self.” Being in love with God requires more than just checking the boxes of the commandments. It requires a sincere and unconditional self-investment. Desiring God with our whole heart, mind, and soul means that I must also desire a relationship with my neighbor with that same degree of fervor.

Biases and prejudices usually occur when people are kept at a distance and treated as objects. We cannot truly know our neighbors, especially if they are different than us, if we keep them in boxes and do not listen to their stories. When we open ourselves to listen to another person’s story, we begin to realize more how similar we are than dissimilar. Being overly attached to our possessions, ideologies, agendas, lifestyles, and personal needs are absolute barriers to achieving the type of personal investment love demands. This is why following Christ can be difficult. It is less a matter of intellect and more a matter of heart and soul. It requires that we transfer our treasure from an investment in tangible secular things and move it into the Kingdom of God. It is only the gift of wisdom and discernment that can help us decide what to do and how to do it.

Contemporaries of Jesus would know that a camel could not enter through the portal of a city weighed down with the baggage it was carrying. In order to enter, the baggage must be removed so that the animal could fit through the entry way. The same is true for us. We carry a lot of excessive baggage around with us that keeps us tethered to our past histories, wounds, myopic world views, prejudices, fears, and suspicions. To invest ourselves in the Kingdom of God, do God’s work and live out our love relationship with God, we need to shed the extra weight. While it may seem that a lot of that stuff is necessary, it really is not. We are much more than the things that we think define us and more secure than we think. The more there is to hold on to and the more that we carry with us, the harder it will be to leave it all behind. Many choose not to and walk away sad because they are not ready to trust.

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 10, 2021 | 28TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
The first reading, Wisdom 7:7-11, About a hundred years before the birth of Jesus, the Jewish community was a minority in the great cosmopolitan city of Alexandria, Egypt, cut off from the comforting religious institutions of Jerusalem, and subject to great cultural pressure from the majority who shaped and ruled this pagan Greek society. The Jews were in danger of losing their identity because of the constant temptation to follow Greek philosophy and Greek morality rather than their Faith traditions. A learned and faithful Jew assessed the situation of his fellow Jews in Alexandria and tried to bolster their faith with a book, now called Wisdom, which offered them a virtuous way of life. By “wisdom” the author meant not just worldly wisdom but a spiritual wisdom that included adherence to older Jewish traditions. Today’s first reading, taken from the book of Wisdom, teaches, somewhat analogously, that one should prefer wisdom to every other good thing. It quotes from King Solomon’s personal valuation of wisdom: “I preferred her [true wisdom] to scepter and throne and deemed riches nothing in comparison with her.” In his prayer for wisdom, the first-century BC Alexandrian Jewish wisdom teacher identifies wisdom as the greatest possession of all and contrasts it with material possessions.

Our culture suffers no shortage of people with academic degrees, corporate titles, and intellectual know-how. But sadly, those who are wise are still hard to find. Why? It’s simple. The pursuit of knowledge, while often good, doesn’t automatically produce wisdom. True wisdom requires us to read God’s Word with the goal of practical application, not merely intellectual stimulation. Wisdom applies truth to all of life...and that takes a lot of time, including numerous and painful trials as well.

The second reading: Hebrews 4:12-13: The Letter to the Hebrews was written to bolster the Faith of Jewish converts to Christianity. These converts faced the contempt of their former Jewish friends, and they felt nostalgia for the institutions of Judaism (rituals, sacrifices, priesthood, etc.), that were either absent or greatly transformed in their new religion, namely Christianity. This letter tries to show them in what ways the new religion of Christianity is better than their old Jewish faith. St. Paul tells them, “The word of God is something alive and active: it cuts like any double-edged sword.” The living and effective word of God has the power to penetrate our body and soul like a double-edge sword. We should allow the word of God in all its vital power and effectiveness to challenge us and our priorities and goals in life. The sharp word of God confronts, chastises, encourages, challenges, nourishes, and inspires all who will hear and receive it.

GOSPEL INSIGHTS

Why should Jesus seemingly reject the title of “good teacher” telling the young man that God alone is good? According to Venerable Bede, the One and Undivided Trinity itself—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—is the Only and One Good God. The Lord, therefore, does not deny Himself to be good, but implies that He is God; He does not deny that He is ‘good Teacher [Master],’ but He declares that no master is good except God.” Fr. John Foley S. J. (Center for Liturgy) suggests a much simpler explanation. Jesus, seeing the seeds of Faith in this man, was trying to grow that Faith. The logic of Jesus’ response would be: (1) Only God is (fully) good. (2) You have called me good. (3) Are you, perhaps, sensing the Godliness in me? Jesus’ injunction to this man was the inspiration for many saints, who have taken Jesus at His word. Perhaps the two most famous were St. Anthony of Egypt (the “Father of Monks” and writer of the first monastic rule; ca. 250-356), and St. Francis of Assisi (ca. 1182-1226), who committed himself to live a life of radical Gospel poverty.

The unaccepted challenge: Jesus realizes that this rich young man is shackled by his possessions. So, he challenges the young man by listing those precepts of the Decalogue that deal with social and familial relations. Then Jesus tells the young man that, if he wants to be perfect, keeping the commandments is not enough. He challenges the young man to share his riches with the poor: “Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, ‘There is one thing lacking. Sell all you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in Heaven. After that, come, follow Me.’” Jesus thus makes it clear that a true follower who wants to possess eternal life must not only be a respectable gentleman who hurts nobody, but also someone who shares his riches, talents and other blessings with the less fortunate. In other words, Jesus tells the young man that life is a matter of priorities. God must have the first priority in our lives. Unfortunately, the rich man is unwilling to accept Jesus’ idea that wealth is not something to be owned but rather something to be shared with others, so “his face fell and he went away sad, for he had many possessions.” Jesus challenges us to do what He asked of the rich young man — to break our selfish attachment to our “wealth” (time, talents, treasure), by sharing everything with our brothers and sisters., and so to follow Him... Our following of Jesus has to be totally and absolutely unconditional. Our attachment may be to money or material goods, to another person, a job, our health, or our reputation. We are called to be so much more than rule-followers; we are called to be Christ’s followers.
Early in Christian history, people who sold everything they owned set up religious orders, so that they could live together and share what they needed. And so Jesus’ exhortation to sell what you have and give to the poor is usually taken as a call to religious life. Understood in that way, Jesus’ advice to the rich young man is one of the counsels of perfection. It explains what you have to do to be perfect in this life.

But here’s a puzzle worth noticing. You don’t have to be perfect to go to heaven. You don’t have to be a member of a religious order to go to heaven. But going to heaven is what the rich young man was asking Jesus about: “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” And so the answer Jesus gave the rich young man should have explained to him what you have to do to get to heaven. A counsel of perfection is by its nature not an answer to the rich young man’s question.

Or put it this way. If selling all he has and giving it to the poor is what the rich young man needs to do to inherit eternal life, what about everybody else? Does everybody have to sell what he has in order to attain heaven? If you don’t sell everything you have, are you going to hell?

The solution to the puzzle is to think about the description of the man asking Jesus the question: he is the rich young man. In other words, his gifts lie in his wealth.

Now gifts are highly various. There are lots of gifts, gifts of learning, of music, of many other things. But whatever a person’s gifts are, they are meant to be given back in service to the Lord. You cannot bury your talent—your gifts—in the ground and hope to please the Lord.

So here is what you need to do to inherit eternal life: You need to follow Jesus and use your gifts to the full when you do.

1. What is greater than any precious gem?
   A) A large home B) Sand C) Wisdom D) Power

2. Which creature is hidden from God?
   A) Insects B) Angels c) Dinosaurs D) None

3. Why was the man sad at Jesus’s response to his question?
   A) He had kept the commandments B) He was a poor man C) He was a rich man D) He didn’t understand Him

4. Jesus compared a rich person entering the Kingdom of God to what?
   A) A camel passing through the eye of a needle B) A fish flying to the highest mountain C) A dog catching its tail D) A child reaching the top shelf

5. What is impossible for God?
   A) Getting a rich man to Heaven B) Forgiving sinners C) Keeping the commandments D) Nothing

QUIZ ANSWERS

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