

Sunday 13th October 2024
The Twentieth Sunday after Trinity

Gospel Reading: Mark 10.17-31

The Rich Man

¹⁷ As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, ‘Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ ¹⁸ Jesus said to him, ‘Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. ¹⁹ You know the commandments: “You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honour your father and mother.”’ ²⁰ He said to him, ‘Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.’ ²¹ Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, ‘You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.’ ²² When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

²³ Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, ‘How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!’ ²⁴ And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, ‘Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.’ ²⁶ They were greatly astounded and said to one another, ‘Then who can be saved?’ ²⁷ Jesus looked at them and said, ‘For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.’

²⁸ Peter began to say to him, ‘Look, we have left everything and followed you.’ ²⁹ Jesus said, ‘Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, ³⁰ who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. ³¹ But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.’

Other Readings: Job 23.1-9,16,17 Psalm 22.1-15 Hebrews 4.12-16

Homily

“Look, we have left everything and followed you.”

Indeed, they had. On Jesus’ invitation, the disciples had abandoned their whole livelihoods and become his followers. It was a bold step, for they didn’t know where it would lead.

Jesus’ response was to say that those who make sacrifices for the sake of the Kingdom will receive more in return than they can imagine. “Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for my sake and for the sake of the good news who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.”

This sounds like a pie-in-the-sky promise, but has it been fulfilled? In fact, it has – and many times over. By leaving a world where each individual scrambles for a piece of the cake and where some get a huge piece and others only crumbs, the Christian who truly has the spirit of the Gospel, enters a community care where the needs of each one are met through the sharing of the community’s resources.

But, sadly, many Christians – rich and poor – live very individualistic lives, participating in ‘religious’ acts to “save their own souls”. The message Jesus taught was that Christianity is about creating a whole *new* way of living, by which people relate to each other in mutual love and care, in a world where the first will be last and the last first. In fact, he is saying that in His world there is no first and no last. Perhaps this can be illustrated by a story:

A rich man was concerned about his future salvation; would he ‘go to heaven’ or not? In order to motivate himself, he asked God to give him a preview of heaven and hell, and God agreed. God said that they would first pay a visit to hell. When they got there the man was greatly surprised. He was brought into the sumptuous dining room of a large restaurant decorated in red and gold. In the centre was a substantial round table and on it were the most exotic and delicious dishes one could imagine. Around the table were seated the diners. However, they were the most miserable-looking group one could imagine, sitting motionless and in silence, just looking at the beautiful food in front of them. The reason for their glumness was that they had been given utensils which were three feet long! There was no way they could get any of the food into their mouths. And they were going to sit there like that for eternity. That was hell!

God then brought the man to heaven. Again, he was amazed, because they were in an identical banquet room, with the same kind of table and the same wonderful food. But everybody was in the highest spirits. The sound of laughter rang out everywhere. They were really enjoying themselves *and the meal*. Was this because they had the normal length utensils? No! Theirs were also three feet long, but here everyone was reaching out for food and serving those on the opposite side of the table ... that was heaven.

This story is an illustration of today’s Gospel. When everyone serves, everyone is served. When everyone gives, everyone gets. It is a lesson even we Christians seem to find difficult to learn. Perhaps we focus too intently on our words, rather than our actions, wanting them to appear important and meaningful and actually end up saying nothing at all really. But if we express what we really think and feel - in a very pure and simple way - we may speak volumes about the Way of Christ and make more of an impact and impression than we realise. The simple message of our faith is that to be good and effective Christians we need to be willing to show our vulnerability and need of others, and to serve others. In doing this, we will reflect God’s image, and His Way will shine through our actions.

Conversation Questions

1. In our communities some are seen as first and others as last. How can we, as Christians, begin to engage meaningfully with those who are seen as first?
2. How can we begin to engage meaningfully with those who are seen as last?
3. Is there anything else from the passage not already discussed that speaks to you? What is it?
4. What will you do this week in your Monday-to-Saturday ministry in response to what you have heard today? #everydayfaith

Prayer

Spend some time in prayer, responding to what you have heard today and listening to what God might be saying to you.

Collect of the day

*God, the giver of life,
whose Holy Spirit wells up within your Church:
by the Spirit's gifts equip us to live the gospel of Christ
and make us eager to do your will,
that we may share with the whole creation
the joys of eternal life;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.*

(or)

*God, our light and our salvation:
illuminate our lives,
that we may see your goodness in the land of the living,
and looking on your beauty
may be changed into the likeness of Jesus Christ our Lord.*

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