

## **Twenty Eighth Sunday of the Year – October 11, 2015**

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

Every person has a desire to do something great in his or her life and produce something important. They aim to set a goal for themselves and want by all means to achieve it. Many people in today's world are determined to do great things and also acquire fame and wealth. Book stores are full of books on how to get rich quickly, on how to make millions by investing in the right place at the right time. Probably many Catholics see nothing wrong with this. Many of us regularly buy lottery tickets and wonder what we would do with a windfall of a couple million dollars, pounds or whatever. Perhaps many would think religiously that if they keep the commandments do not harm anyone, live a good and comfortable life, provided they are morally good persons, then what possible harm they could do. Today's reading is a challenge to such complacency. Many seem to think about themselves and do not go beyond the individual world. Several would consider themselves fortunate for having gained good health, wealth and good life. They would think certainly it is a blessing from the Almighty. Our Lord today speaks to us a word that is both inviting and challenging. He asks us to follow him. In the first reading tells us of the wise king who teaches us the way to wisdom. It begins with prayer. In the second reading we are reminded that the word of God is alive and active and is like a sword that penetrates into our innermost being. We must take seriously and respond wholeheartedly. In the Gospel Jesus teaches us a hard lesson about wealth, possessions and who will enter into the Kingdom of God. To achieve the kingdom a person has to be totally detached.

Today's First Reading speaks of the wealth that is found in wisdom. It provides true happiness and frees a person from fear. Its greatest advantage is that it leads to eternal life. True wisdom cannot be acquired by human initiative. It is a gift from God. King Solomon pleads with God to grant him the gift of wisdom. Of course God does not withhold such a gift from anyone who seeks it. But seeking it is the key to finding it. Nothing on earth can match wisdom because its advantages reach beyond the realm of time and space. The Book of Wisdom in the opening chapters says that God created men and women to enjoy eternal life. A person seeking true wisdom renders service to God as he takes his first step to eternal life. Since wisdom is a gift from the creator, it follows that those who enjoy it will find themselves blessed with many other gifts in creation. Wisdom is to be esteemed more than any honor or authority, splendor and riches. Before wisdom all gold is a pinch of sand, and beside her silver ranks as mud, says the author. She is more valuable than health, beauty and even the light because in her company all good

things have come to remain. Wisdom which is more valued than love, security, freedom and happiness, guides us towards God and blesses us with the gift of salvation. Without wisdom, we are spiritually blind. In spiritual blindness, we become as lost sheep that walk aimlessly, waiting for the wolves to devour them.

The two verses presented in the second reading of today place before all Christians a simple warning that nothing they do can be hidden from God for their innermost thoughts and intentions are known to him. They must therefore live, act and think as true Christians if they would enter into the rest God has prepared for them in the eternal city of Heaven. When God gives us a command, whether in Scriptures or in the events of our daily lives, it penetrates into the innermost depth of our being. God's word never ceases us to invade our lives. This Word of God is living and active is in the midst of us producing its effects. This word is so sharp that it can penetrate and pierce into man's most interior and hidden recesses. This person can hide from his fellow human beings but not from God. Every person's secrets and deeds are known to all powerful God. This passage is an argument for why we should be so diligent to enter God's rest by hearing and believing God's word. To enter this great and joyful rest we must trust God and in his promises. At the same time it is special grace and joy that God blesses us with his word. That we are able to respond is also a grace. It is important then that God's word makes a difference in our lives. God cares enough that he looks for a generous response. We are not to receive God's grace in vain.

In the passage we heard from the Gospel of Mark indicates the vision Jesus is unfolding to his disciples and shows his way that will ultimately lead to the salvation. Significantly, we are told at the beginning that Jesus was setting out on a journey, literally, that he was setting out on the road or the way. This way is leading Jesus to Jerusalem, to his suffering, cross, death, resurrection and it is the way his followers are expected to follow. It is the ultimate place where Jesus is going to be glorified. Jesus himself is the Way, the truth and life and to be with him is to be on the Way to life. The lesson in today's reading from the Gospel of Mark is to indicate the hardship and difficulty for the rich people of this world who are attached to their riches, to enter into eternal life. However, although it is hard, it is not impossible. Jesus himself says that with men it is impossible but not with God. For all things are possible with God. Here God can give and will give the grace to overcome this worldly attraction. This passage that concerns wealth and salvation consists of three parts: the encounter of Jesus with the rich young man, a hard teaching about the impossibility for the wealthy to be saved, and Peter's question about the value of giving up everything to follow Jesus.

The first episode involves a man who is obviously attracted to Jesus and wants to be one of his followers. Mark tells us that he runs up to Jesus, probably because he had heard that Jesus was a good, attractive and charitable person. The Love of God that is in Jesus draws to him this man who is unnamed by the evangelist, but who can be considered an example for every person to whom this narrative is addressed. Mathew calls him young and Luke says he is a ruler. He calls Jesus as Good, perhaps indicating the great esteem he had for Christ. Perhaps he accepted him as the Messiah who could certainly explain about eternal life. This person has one aim in life to inherit the eternal life and asks Jesus directly how he can attain it. By the very encounter we come to know him as a morally good person. For him, religion and therefore holiness consisted in being a morally good person in the eyes of God. He openly explains to Jesus that he has kept all the commandments and has lived a good religious life. He had not harmed any one and had observed what the law expected him to do. But all the emphasis was on himself and his own individual perfection and never went beyond that norm. This young man is like the person who went before the judgment seat of God to tell him that he has everything good and has not hurt anyone and his hands are so clean. But God looked at them and said but my friend your hands are clean but empty.

Mark tells us that Jesus looking upon him loved him, a love that reaches out in concern for the deepest wellbeing of the other, and the kind of love that the Gospel asks us to extend to every single person. Then he told the young man that keeping the commandments was not quite enough and he has to do something more. He explained to him that he lacked one thing; he had to go, sell all his possessions and give them to the poor, and he will have treasure in heaven. After this he was to come to Jesus and become his disciple. At that saying the gospel tells us that his countenance fell, and he went away sorrowful, because he was a wealthy person. Here Jesus challenged him to do something unique, not so much to deprive oneself of money and possessions but the necessity and need to help the poor. It is only at this point we come to know he was rich. He was shocked by what Jesus had asked him to do and he left the place immediately. All this must be understood within the social and religious context of Jesus' time. Wealth in general for the Jews signified God's grace and acceptability. Jesus teaches just the opposite. The Evangelist tells us that he went away sorrowful because for him the pull of the wealth was so strong overpowering the call of Jesus. He could not put into action what Jesus asked him to do. He could not sacrifice all his riches in order to be with Jesus. While all riches in themselves are good, any over attachment to worldly goods is one of the big obstacles to enter into heaven.

The teaching Jesus offers his disciples about how hard it is for the wealthy to enter the kingdom of God is not at all comforting. The young man in today's Gospel wanted eternal life. But he was much attached to his material possessions. He knew the commandments well and followed them faithfully and lived a good life. But he was not at all willing to sacrifice his possessions and make eternal life his primary goal. Jesus makes a figurative statement of the camel and eye of the needle, an imagery to indicate how difficult it is to a person who is attached to riches to enter into heaven. This would lead to the conclusion that the rich cannot enter into the Kingdom of heaven. This imagery needs some explanation. This may have meant the small city gate which was closed at dusk, where even the large animal like a camel would have to struggle to pass through. This was to indicate that all attachments are destructive. This would have shocked the disciples as they knew from the Old Testament that riches are a blessing and poverty is the curse. What Jesus says is that it is important to put ones trust in God and not in material possessions and he must give up his dependence on these things. Jesus demands a lot from his followers. In fact he demands everything. At the same time Jesus makes it clear that the salvation comes from God and not from any human effort or accomplishment. Jesus promises to his disciples that Salvation is something that is humanly impossible but all is possible for God. Without the grace of God, no one could be saved.

Once again we have Peter speaking on behalf of the Apostles. Perhaps here he was a little proud of himself and his companions and he reminds Jesus that they have sacrificed everything to be with him. It may not have been too much of material goods or money they had given up, yet it was all they have had and could have had. Later they gave up their lives for Jesus, the greatest offering any person could make. Christ promises them that the eternal kingdom which they will inherit will be worth a hundred times more than all they have left. He tells them as he tells us of the concrete sacrifice made by the disciple such as giving up house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for his sake and for the gospel. They will receive a hundredfold reward now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. The word persecutions are also added by Jesus as a reward. Perhaps this was added by Mark to speak of the persecutions in the early church and to explain the happiness and peace manifested by the martyrs. This shows the extraordinary way in which Jesus fills us with magnificent gifts when we have given all to God, in spirit or in reality. The Lord himself fills us with his gifts, both spiritual and temporal, including the gift of the Eucharist. Therefore if a person wishes to follow Jesus fully, he must be the center of our lives. Jesus will be of greater importance to us than family, career, or other noble ideals. Jesus today calls

each one to examine self and let go anything that blocks from coming closer to him. His invitation will follow all the while and he will demand a response from everyone.

In the Divine Plan of Salvation, it is important for us to know the difference between obtaining the gift of eternal life versus the gift of salvation. Surely, eternal life alone is not what the man was asking Jesus. Having improperly expressed him as we frequently do, he asked the wrong question but got the right answer. Jesus knows the hearts of all and he knew what the man was asking, how to inherit the Kingdom of God, and thus gain salvation. The grace of God draws us to Jesus; it leads us to him in order that we might learn to know him in a perfect love. But this love of Jesus is demanding: the Christian religion is a demanding religion, a religion that asks men and women to follow Christ, renouncing themselves as well as all other creatures. In short, he who wants to be joined to the person of Jesus through the love that is of knowledge and life must renounce keeping his own life for himself: he must entrust it to God in order that God might keep it in himself eternally. This rich young man was good; Jesus wanted him to be even better. So he tells him what he has to do for his perfection is to sacrifice all he had and remain empty before God. Let us also ask our heavenly Father in the name of Jesus to respond fully to the call. May the grace of God richly shine on each and every one of us to come forward and show our attachment to him. We ask for the grace to sacrifice something personal and valuable to secure eternal life and kingdom of God.

There was once a wise woman traveling in the mountains who found a precious stone in a stream. She placed it in her haversack thinking it would be useful sometime. The next day she met another traveler who was hungry, and she opened her bag to share her food with him. The hungry traveler saw the precious stone and asked if she might give it to him. She did so without hesitation and they finished their meal. The traveler left, rejoicing in his good fortune. He knew the stone was worth enough to give him security for a lifetime. However soon he discovered that he was unable sleep frightened of robbers and of his own life. Feeling miserable he came back to the woman a few days later, to return the stone to the woman who had willingly given it to him. 'I've been thinking,' he said, 'I know how valuable the stone is, but I'm giving it back in the hope that you can give me something much more precious. I want you to give me what you have within you that enabled you to give me the stone without any hesitation.'

Fr Eugene Lobo S.J. Bangalore, India