

Wisdom, A Preciousness Possession
October 10, 2021, Twenty-Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Gospel of Mark 10:17-30
Fr. Brad

How do we reconcile the Old Testament traditional notion that wealth and abundance was a sign of God's favour with Jesus' teaching in today's Gospel?

The Old Testament is full of stories about the wealth and abundance of those who kept the Lord's commandments. And cursed were those who forgot that the source of their wealth was God.

Jesus turned this revered tradition upside down. He basically condemned wealth in the harshest terms, Consider: *'Woe to you who are rich, for you have received your reward....it is to the poor that the kingdom of God belongs.'* (from Luke's Gospel) Or the story of the rich man and Lazarus. Or *'he who does not let go of all he has to follow me cannot be my disciple.'*

These are raw statements. But we do find that Jesus is both moderate and radical. We must also remember that Jesus did not insist that all his friends give up everything they had. eg. Martha and Mary, Zacchaeus, Nicodemus, and Joseph of Arimathea.

So let's look more closely at our Gospel of today.

When we step back and look at the essence of this Gospel, we are challenged to ask, 'What is our relationship with our possessions?' Are we so consumed with the business of protecting what we have, that it has come to take first place in our minds and hearts? Do we see that all we possess are gifts that we are ultimately called to be stewards of and not absolute owners of?

The gifts we receive are not meant to be clung to but to be shared and given away. The talents we have that have allowed us to gain abundance are themselves gifts.

For some, the Lord may indeed be saying **give it all away**. For others, He may simply be saying **share** what you possess with your brothers and sisters. But in either case, **do whatever is necessary to keep God first in our lives**. If riches and possessions are keeping us from that then get them out of the way. As well, can we give up not only possessions but our preferences; that is, the way we spend some of our time?

It's not about whether one is rich or not but whether or not we are rich toward God.

Can we say we are doing all that we can with what we have regardless of how much we have or don't have by world's standards?

We know we are surrounded by people who are hurting, and that there is poverty in so many ways that go beyond economic hardship. There are many ways of being poor – be it lack of essentials such as food, clothing, and shelter. There are so many who are lacking in love and attention and emotional nurturing, physical mobility and the ability to function independently for whatever reason. What is needed for so many is not just food but faith, a caring personal touch, the gift of our time - - our personal presence in another's life.

Jesus' use of such strong dramatic language draws our attention and focus on **the need to learn to put God first**. And when we do this, we find ourselves drawn outward toward others who are lacking in the basics for living a fuller life. **Our participation in helping others live a fuller life gives us in return, a fuller life.**

We are called to show some heroism and some sacrifice. This was the invitation Jesus offered to the rich man, who had been following the commandments, an invitation to take that next step of commitment. Jesus looks upon each of us with love and invites us to a deeper commitment.

Regardless of how busy, sophisticated or simple our lives are, do we put our hearts into our daily lives - - into the work or activities we do, whatever it is, and toward the people we encounter?

Remember, wherever we are and whomever we encounter, we may well be bringing the very presence of Jesus into that situation.

Our 1st reading reminds us that a **primary ingredient** to responding fully to the invitation Jesus puts forth is in **the gift of wisdom**. It is only in wisdom that we can accept that invitation - - an invitation that transcends the conventional ways on which the world operates. The **word** and thus **wisdom** of God is sharper than any two edged sword and, piercing until it divides soul from spirit.

Ron Rolheiser says it this way, *'The way of wisdom is the way of pondering, the way of holding every kind of pain, suffering, delight, and contradiction long enough until it transforms you, gestates within you, and brings you to your knees in a thousand surrenders.'*

Thus, the disciples' alarmed response to Jesus, *'Then who can be saved?'* when Jesus speaks of the criterion for entering the kingdom of God. Here the disciples realize it's not about being amazed by what Jesus can do but about what is at stake here and how helpless they really are before God. It is in wisdom that we come to realize that amazement eventually leads to puzzlement and dissatisfaction. **Amazement does not transform, it only looks for the next thing to be amazed about.**

The way of wisdom brings us to the realization of some of the reasons we are afraid to give up certain things in our lives. Maybe we are afraid that in giving more away, we would have to depend on others more. Maybe we are afraid of becoming too dependent. Self-sufficiency is highly valued in our society. Yet in real community, we do at some level rely on each other and that is a good thing because then, we can tap into the gifts of others and they can tap into ours to create mutually fuller and more satisfying lives.

Sometimes the very things we cannot let go of are the very things that keep us in the grip of sadness.

We must somehow become small in order to pass through the eye of a needle. May God grant each of us the wisdom to know what we need to let go of and the grace and courage to carry it out in trust, that we continue to make more room for God's reign in our hearts. Amen