

## Pastor's Homily – 28<sup>th</sup> Sunday (B) – October 14<sup>th</sup> 2018

Think about this image. When you were a child did you ever shove your hand into a candy jar and grab all that you could? Only to find out that you couldn't remove your hand! Solving such a dilemma required some thought. Your sweet tooth would urge you to keep your hand closed around the goodies and to grab as much as possible. But in the end, you'd have to search for a better solution. Aside from breaking the candy jar, the only sensible way to extricate your hand would be to relinquish the candy.

Today's Gospel offers a similar challenge – to let go. “As he was setting out for Jerusalem, Jesus was approached by a man who desired to inherit eternal life.” He had kept God's law, and may have thought that he was well-prepared for the kingdom Jesus had come to preach. But Jesus pressed the man towards a holiness (and a detachment) that he hadn't anticipated. Let go of your possessions; let go of what's holding you back, then come and follow me – unencumbered and free (or, at least, a little freer).

St Mark leaves the reader hanging at this point. He doesn't give us an example to follow. He simply states that “*the man went away sad for he had many possessions.*” The sad man's departure poses a series of questions for readers of the Gospel:

- What would I do?
- What am I willing to let go of in this great “candy jar” of life in order to respond more fully to Jesus' call to discipleship?
- Am I able to un-clench the fists (the hands) that hold tightly to the things that give my life a sense of security and pleasure and well-being?
- Can I let go of my nest-egg; my rainy day fund?
- What is it, in my life, at this moment, that's blocking a fuller commitment to God?

As I reflected on this Gospel story this past week, I couldn't help but think of the scandal and crisis facing the church these days. I couldn't help but think about the total mess surrounding the revelations about Archbishop Theodore McCarrick. I couldn't help but speculate on the possible analogies and similarities between the man in the Gospel and the Ex-cardinal of Washington.

- Here was a guy who rose to the highest levels in the church.
- Here was a guy who like the man in today's Gospel, was convinced that he kept the rules (the commandments) and was on the “fast-track” to the Kingdom.
- Here was a guy like the man in the Gospel who makes a profession of perfection, rather than a confession of personal sinfulness.
- Here was a guy who dramatically and theatrically “falls at the feet of Jesus” but already knows he's got a closet full of skeletons.
- Here was a man who calls Jesus “Good,” but Jesus didn't fall for the phony compliments and show.

The man's questions betray his own self-interest. He doesn't ask: “what must I do to give honor to God,” but: “what must I do to INHERIT Eternal Life.” The word “inherit” suggests an expectation that borders on a “birthright” – God will OWE him the Kingdom *if* he follows the rules.”

Jesus knew something big and important was (MIA) missing-in-action! When Jesus says to the man “*you are lacking in one thing,*” it's safer and more comforting to think that it's just a matter of objects and things (and possessions)! We give ourselves “a pass” when we assume the “detachment” that Jesus demands simply applies to material “stuff.” I think that what Jesus is saying to the man in the Gospel is: you are lacking – the purity of intention. You want the Kingdom of God – that's good. You publicly obey many of the commandments. That's good too. But there's this other part of you: the tail that is wagging the dog; a dark side; the distractions; the detours; the alternatives routes – that don't conform to the “narrow road” towards the kingdom.

Get rid of those things – those attitudes, those behaviors; those presumptions (and preoccupations) and *then* you will (begin to reserve or) have treasure in heaven. After that, come – follow me. Take your hand out of the “candy jar” – then you can talk about eternal rewards.

I’m sure Archbishop McCarrick preached on this Gospel hundreds of times. But apparently, he didn’t make the connections and apply the demands and expectations of Jesus to his personal life. Only now, he goes away “sad.” The collective “face” of the church falls at these revelations and we are both sad and mad that this situation (that these multiple situations) exist. But it must stir us (the church) to a greater sanctification, renewal and purity of intention, as we individually and collectively seek to follow Jesus more faithfully in our various states in life. Presumably – that’s why we keep coming back. We don’t leave Jesus because of Judas or McCarrick – *or* the institutional church – (if though we might be tempted to as an easy out to the demands of the Gospel).

As the Gospel story continues and the rich man falls into the background, the line that strikes me is: “*how hard it is.*” Jesus says that twice. “*Children – how hard it is to enter the Kingdom of God.*” How “*hard it is*” to hear about sin and scandal and to stay on the right path. “*How hard it is*” when we have something in our lives *blocking* us from a more faithful commitment to God in our roles and vocations in life.

We have to go and “*sell off*” whatever it is that stands in the way of our fidelity to God. We have to “*sell off*” (expunge) our discouragement; and resolve to be hopeful moving forward – because this isn’t about hierarchy or the apostles – but about following the person of Jesus and letting go of whatever separates us – from Him.

So, today, let’s think about Jesus’ statement to the rich man that applies to each of us – “there is one thing you are lacking” and then, fill in the blank.

Just this morning at the canonizations in Rome, Pope Francis commented on this Gospel. The Pope said: “the Lord wants us to leave behind what weighs-down our hearts. Jesus asks for an un-divided heart. We can’t respond only by observing a few of the commandments. Our heart is like a magnet. Either it will be attracted to live for itself, or to live for love; to live without “lukewarmness;” to live without calculation – but with passion – leaving everything else behind!”

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