

28th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year B

(Wis 7:7-11; Heb 4:12-13; Mark 10:17-30)

Excerpts from Pope Francis (14 October 2018)

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10 October 2021

Brothers and sisters, the second reading tells us that “the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword (*Heb 4:12*). It really is: God’s word is not merely a set of truths or an edifying spiritual account. No – it is a living word that touches our lives, that transforms our lives. It is Jesus in person, the living Word of God, who speaks to our hearts.

The Gospel, in particular, invites us to an encounter with the Lord, after the example of the “man” who “ran up to him” (cf. *Mk10:17*). We can recognize ourselves in that man, whose name the text does not give, as if to suggest that he could represent each one of us. He asks Jesus how “*to inherit eternal life*” (v. 17). He is seeking life without end, life in its fullness: and who of us would not want this? Yet we notice that he asks for it as an *inheritance*, as a good to be obtained, to be won by his own efforts. In fact, in order to possess this good, he has observed the commandments from his youth and to achieve this he is prepared to follow others; and so he asks: “What must *I do to have eternal life?*”

Jesus’s answer catches him off guard. That man was speaking in terms of supply and demand, Jesus proposes to him a story of love. He asks him to pass from the observance of laws to the gift of self, from *doing for oneself* to *being with God*. And the Lord suggests to the man a life that cuts to the quick: “Sell what you have and give to the poor...and come, follow me” (v. 21). To you, too, Jesus says: “Come, follow me!” *Come*: do not stand still, because it is not enough not to do evil in order to be with Jesus. *Follow me*: do not walk behind Jesus only when you want to, but seek him out every day; do not be satisfied to keep the commandments, to give some little alms and say a few prayers: find in Him the God who always loves you, the meaning of your life, the strength to give of yourself.

Again, Jesus says: “Sell what you have and give to the poor.” The Lord does not discuss theories of poverty and wealth, but goes directly to life. He asks you to *leave behind what weighs down your heart*, to empty yourself of goods in order to make room for him, the only good. We cannot truly follow Jesus when we are loaded down with things. Because if our hearts are crowded with goods, there will not be room for the Lord, who will become just one thing among the others. For this reason, wealth is dangerous and even makes one’s salvation difficult. Not because God is stern, no! The problem is on our part: our having too much, our wanting too much suffocates us, suffocates our hearts and makes us incapable of loving. We see this where money is at the centre, there is no room for God nor for the person in front of us.

Jesus is radical. He *gives all and he asks all*: he gives a love that is total and asks for an undivided heart. Even today he gives himself to us as the living bread; can we give him crumbs in exchange? We cannot respond to him, who made himself our servant even going to the cross for us, only by observing some of the commandments. We cannot give him, who offers us eternal life, some odd moment of time. Jesus is not content with a “percentage of love”: we cannot love him twenty or fifty or sixty percent. It is either all or nothing.

Brothers and sisters, our heart is like a magnet: it lets itself be attracted by love, but it can cling to one master only and it must choose: either it will love God or it will love the world’s treasure (cf. *Mt* 6:24); either it will live for love or it will live for itself (cf. *Mk* 8:35). Let us ask ourselves where we are in our story of love with God. Do we content ourselves with a few commandments or do we follow Jesus as lovers, really prepared to leave behind something for him? Jesus asks each of us and all of us as we are all on this journey. Let us ask for the grace always to *leave things behind* for love of the Lord: to leave behind wealth, leave behind the yearning for status and power, leave behind structures that are no longer adequate for proclaiming the Gospel, those weights that slow down our mission, the strings that tie us to the world. We find joy in some fleeting pleasure, we close ourselves off in useless gossip, we settle into the sameness of a Christian life without momentum, where a little narcissism covers over the sadness of remaining unfulfilled.

This is how it was for the man, who – the Gospel tells us – “went away *grieving*”. He was tied down to regulations of the law and to his many possessions; he had not given over his heart. Even though he had encountered Jesus and received his loving gaze, the man went away sad. Sadness is the proof of unfulfilled love, the sign of a lukewarm heart. On the other hand, a heart detached by possessions, that freely loves the Lord, always spreads *joy*, that joy for which there is so much need today. Pope Saint Paul VI wrote: “It is indeed in the midst of their distress that our fellow men need to know joy, to hear its song” (*Gaudete in Domino*, I). Today Jesus invites us to return to the source of joy, which is the encounter with him, the courageous choice to risk everything to follow him, the satisfaction of leaving something behind in order to embrace his way. The saints have travelled this path. May the Lord help us to imitate their example.