

28th Sunday of the Year

Year B

Christ, Our Wealth.

*Even though we had nothing in this world that we could call our own,
in having Christ, the wisdom of God, we possess all things; we are rich in him.
He is the word of God that is alive and active in our hearts.*

(Readings: Wisdom 7: 7-11. Hebrews 4: 12-13. Mark 10: 17-30.)

What do we REALLY want from life?

I emphasise the word ‘really’ because I, for one, am convinced that the things we really want, and the things we think we really want are very rarely, if ever, the same thing. We say we want this or that; but when life puts us to the test, it turns out that we actually want something completely different.

Today’s Gospel clearly illustrates this strange, yet inherently human contradiction. It speaks of a man who came running to Jesus, knelt in his presence and said, ‘Good Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?’

Everything about the scene would suggest that here was a man who clearly knew exactly what he wanted. He came running with an urgency, and a purpose. He knew where he was going. And he was eager to get there. He knelt before Jesus, showing a high level of humility, coupled with a willingness to learn, as indicated by his precise and well considered question.

The man saw a quality in the life of Jesus that he thought he wanted in his own life. But when Jesus told him how to reach that goal, how to attain that same quality of life, his face fell. He gave up his search and went back to his old way of living. What he thought he wanted, and what he really wanted, turned out to be two very different things. That same kind of contradiction can easily take place in our lives, though it is usually so subtle that we are not even aware of it.

We tell ourselves that we are pursuing some worthwhile goal, when all the while we are actually seeking some lesser objective, serving our own personal, selfish, agenda. This is the reason why I asked the question the way I did, emphasising the word ‘really.’ What do you, and, of course, what do I, REALLY want from life?

Quite simply, I believe the things we really want are those things for which we are willing to pay the price. We choose some noble objective in life. And we tell ourselves, and our friends, that this is our goal. But we never get around to meeting the cost necessary to reach that goal. This, I suggest, is a form of hypocrisy, even if it’s not deliberate.

It is easy to see this contradiction in the life of the man in the Gospel story. – He was rich and powerful. He was what we would call ‘a successful man’. But for all of that, he had not found the fulfilment of his heart’s desire. Then one day a Galilean Carpenter-turned-wandering teacher, told him how he could have the kind of life that he thought he wanted. However, there was a price. Jesus said, ‘Go and sell everything you own and give the money to the poor... then come, follow me.’

It was at that point, that the man's, albeit unintended hypocrisy was so clearly exposed. He had been telling himself that he wanted eternal life. But when he learned what that kind of living would cost, he changed his mind. It turned out that what he really wanted, what he most wanted, was temporal, worldly riches, because that was the thing for which he was willing to pay the price, even that of his own soul.

Jesus challenged this young man to give up his wealth in order to follow him. We, likewise, say we want to follow the Lord. But what would we be prepared to give up?

It is one thing to say that we want to follow Jesus, but are we actually, honestly, prepared to pay the price he asks? And, of course, the price is different for each person. For some, like the young man in the Gospel, he demands giving up their wealth and following him as a Religious. For others, he asks them to give up their independence, and marry, and have children, and make all those sacrifices involved in creating a good home. Conversely, for those people who are un-marriageable, those who are unable to make a lifelong commitment to a husband or a wife, Jesus would ask them not to marry. If someone has a drink, or a drug problem, Jesus would ask them to seek all the help available to overcome it, and so, be cured.

We all want to improve our character and have better relationships with people. We would like to have happy homes, and enduring friendships. But how hard are we working to achieve those goals?

The only way to determine what you, and what I, really want from life is to answer those questions honestly. And if we want those 'worthwhile things', then we must pay the price in order to get them. If, on the other hand, we want those cheap, transitory things, such as possessions and wealth, then, yes, we can have them, and have them now, but we will pay for them later.

The man in the Gospel was faced with a choice, eternal life or temporary riches. The first, required payment in advance. The second, he could have immediately, though, to his ultimate cost, he wasn't prepared to sacrifice his wealth, there and then, to obtain it.

Jesus was honest in telling that man, as he is with us, that following him involves making sacrifices. Even so, there are great benefits, even in this world. Remember how Peter in a moment of anxiety asked Jesus, "What about us? We have left everything and followed you." Jesus assured him that anyone who makes sacrifices to follow Christ 'will be repaid a hundred times over, in this life, and in the world to come', and they will win eternal life.

So, what do we really want from life? What is our heart's desire? Is it eternal life? And if it is, are we prepared to make the necessary sacrifices, and pay the price demanded?