Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





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“You are lacking in one thing” (Mark 10:21).

Twenty-Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Wis 7:7-11; Ps 90; Heb 4:12-13; Mark 10:17-30

Today’s readings bring to mind St. Francis of Assisi, a rich young man who falls in love with Lady Poverty and finds his heart’s desire in following Jesus. Instead of inheriting his father’s cloth business, he strips himself and walks away from family and future to accompany Christ. He experiences today’s response to Psalm 90: “Fill us with your love, O Lord, and we will sing for joy!”

The rich man in today’s Gospel hears the same call and approaches Jesus with the same joyful readiness, yet he goes away sad when he is challenged to abandon his earthly inheritance and the freedom that wealth afforded him, to pursue an eternal inheritance by following Jesus. Instead of being a story about the call of another Apostle, Mark makes it a cautionary tale about how wealth can distract us from freely responding to Jesus.

There must have been something special in this man’s eagerness, for Jesus “looked at him and loved him.” He was clearly calling him. We know that Jesus did not call every follower to radical poverty. When Jesus says to the man, “You are lacking in one thing,” we are reminded of his visit to the house of Martha and Mary when he says to them: “One thing is necessary” (Luke 10:42). Though they do not sell their possessions to accompany him, Mary follows Jesus by listening to his words with all her heart.

But in the case of the rich man, Jesus exposes the one attachment that challenges him to the core. It was not just money, but family identity and status, and his loyalty and obedience to his human father as his heir. If he were to join Jesus' band traveling to Jerusalem, he would be leaving that family to join another family and a different future.

The weight of this decision falls on all of us as we read this story. What attachment is keeping us from greater loyalty and obedience to Jesus, his *Abba* and the Beloved Community that places its full confidence in God to provide everything they need in this world and eternal life to come? But one size does not fit all, so you and I must discern Jesus' call in our circumstances and determine how we can follow him more freely. My deepest attachment may be control rather than things, or predictability and security rather than just possessions. What do I experience when Jesus looks at me with love? What deters you today when he says, "Come, follow me"? The answer will be different for each of us.

Jesus' disciples are amazed when he says it is hard for those with wealth to enter the Kingdom of God. He reminds them that it is possible only with God's help, which is true for everyone. We go to heaven by grace and not our own effort. As Hebrews 4:12-13 reminds us, the Word comes to us like a two-edged sword that exposes our innermost thoughts. This intimate probe is how we learn what is keeping us from surrendering ourselves to the divine will. If we address this attachment with God's help, we will deepen our discipleship.

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