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Bare before the truth of the word

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Spiritual Reflections

Gathered together once again in the presence of God's living and effective word, we are revealed for who we are before God and others and, even better, God is revealed, yet again, in our midst. Like the author of Hebrews (second reading) who understood the power of God's word to cut to the quick of all matters so as to lay bare the truth, the 12th-century doctor of the church Bernard of Clairvaux was similarly convinced. "The word of God," Bernard wrote, "is not a sounding but a piercing word, not pronounceable by the tongue but efficacious in the mind, not only sensible to the ear but fascinating to the affection. God's word is not an object possessing beauty of form, but rather, it is the source of all beauty and form.



Eight Sunday in Ordinary
Time

God's word is not visible to the bodily eyes, but rejoices the eyes of the heart. And God's
Wisdom 7:7-11

word is not pleasing because of the harmony of its color, but by reason of the ardour of the love it excites?
(quoted in *A Treasury of Quips, Quotes and Anecdotes*, Anthony Castle, Ed., Twenty-Third Publications, 1998).

Psalm 90
Hebrews 4:12-13
Mark 10:17-30

Such was the experience of the word of God that moved the author of today's first reading (purported to be Solomon) to share his desire for the word above all else. Rather than riches, health, beauty or long life, this ancient brother or sister of ours prayed for wisdom. Regarded as God's own spirit, intelligent, holy, the fashioner of all things and the image of God's glorious goodness, wisdom was also regarded as the creative *logos* or word of God in which all truth is revealed. Understood in this way, the gift of God's word-wisdom is more precious and valuable than any other possession. Unfortunately, human beings are sometimes slow and/or even reluctant to place such value upon a gift that can't be seen or touched or

counted. God's gift of wisdom-word offers security but not of a monetary sort. It offers power and prestige but not in a worldly sense, and while it is a treasure beyond measure, it is not earned or merited. It is pure gift as are all of God's good and gracious blessings.

This truth is affirmed in today's Gospel. Although the young man who ran up to Jesus and knelt before him had the good sense to know he was in the presence of one who spoke the truth and lived by the truth he spoke, he had much to learn. His question, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?", as Baptist pastor Bob Buchanan pointed out, was a good one but his assumptions were wrong. He was of the mind that goodness was achieved by oneself. He also thought that eternal life should be merited by the good that he did. He probably also assumed that his good fortune and many possessions were somehow proportionately related to or the result of his efforts at observing the commandments of God from his youth. His final erroneous assumption was that everything could be bought for a price, including eternal life. As Barbara Brown Taylor (*The Preaching Life*, Cowley Publications, 1993) has affirmed, "No matter what we do, none of us earns eternal life. We can keep the commandments until we are blue in the face; we can sign our paychecks over to Mother Teresa and rattle tin cups for our supper without ever earning a place at the banquet table of God. The kingdom of God is not for sale. It never has been; it never will be. The poor cannot buy it with their poverty and the rich cannot buy it with their riches. The kingdom of God is a consummate gift." When the rich man realized this truth, it came as a shock to his sensibilities. All he had been taught was being challenged; all he had believed through all his life was being shaken to its foundations.

There, in the truth of God's word as spoken and explained by Jesus, all of the man's assumptions fell to pieces. Unable to cope with the challenge of the word, he went away sad. I like to think he eventually came back to Jesus and, with God's grace, accepted God's gifts with humility and gratitude. However, this Gospel is about more than one man's choice; it is about you and me and our willingness, or not, to open ourselves to the truth of God's word and without any assumptions or presumptive expectations to accept as gift all that God so generously offers. We do not deserve God's gifts even though we go to church, keep the commandments and the law of love, tithe, volunteer, read the Bible and pray daily. We are not worthy because we are just, honest, merciful, generous to the poor and supportive of foreign missions. We are blessed with every grace and all good gifts because despite the truth of our sinfulness and selfishness, God loves us, and even though our ugliness is laid bare before the word of God, our Creator allows the divine image to shine forth in us. For all this, for God, for the word, let us be truly grateful.

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