

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Oct 11th 2015

The story in today's gospel is a familiar and wonderful short story filled with lots of tensions and emotions. It begins with a man approaching Jesus and asking him the important question, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus seems to rebuke the man a couple of times, yet he ignores the rebukes and continues to ask his burning question. Saying that he has been faithful to the commandments all his life; what more must he do to be complete? This is clearly a good person who awaits further instructions from Jesus.

Jesus responds out of love for him and offers the challenge: "go sell what you have and give it to the poor . . . then come follow me." At this point the man backs off: "his face fell and he went away sad because he had many possessions".

Jesus was asking the young man to be his disciple. Sadly, he said no to Jesus' offer. He chose holding on to his possessions over following Jesus. The issue for him was that he could not part from his possessions which were extensive. I have often wondered what happened to him afterwards: did he rethink his position and turn to Jesus? Did he continue to trust and covet his riches? We will never know since this is the only time we encounter him in his encounter with Jesus. The call to be a disciple is indeed a profound decision to follow Jesus. How might this man have stacked up against the twelve that Jesus called to be disciples? My inclination is to think would have been equal to the challenge of disciple-ship.

This is where we fit into the gospel story. We are all (rich and poor alike) called to be followers of Jesus, to serve at his side in a word, to be disciples. We, too, need to assess what it is I need to "sell" so that we can more faithfully be with Christ? What is it that might hinder us from responding to Jesus' call? What might we do about it?

Let's put ourselves in the shoes of the rich young man asked to follow the Lord. We too come to the encounter with Jesus as good persons looking to add spiritual depth in using our God-given talents.

Are we perfect? Clearly not! But the twelve Jesus called to be followers during his public ministry were hardly perfect themselves. As they journeyed with Jesus on the plains and hills of Galilee and in the streets of Jerusalem we discover one who totally sold out on Jesus for a wad of silver, another who denied that he even knew Jesus, and a pair of brothers who seemed interested only in their being on the right and left hand of Jesus in the kingdom.

The story of the rich young man might also be called "following Jesus: the ups and downs of being a

disciple”; or “Here is the beginning of a long journey down the road with Jesus”; or “following Jesus a call to love as he loved”. To be a disciple means everyday faithfulness, not success as perfection and the pursuit of perfection implies. We’re called to trust the good God.

“Only God is good,” Jesus says in the beginning of his dialogue with the man: to be a disciple, then, is to set one’s eyes on God and not on possessions (read here one’s gifts and accomplishments). The man was sad because he valued his possessions over the call of Jesus. With God’s help we can and will be disciples.

Lord, continue to bless us with the desire to say “yes” to our call to disciple-ship. Help us like your original disciples to walk faithfully with you the paths that make up our life life’s situation. Be with us as we carry out your call. Let us realize that our call comes from you and leads us to the Father, the giver of all good gifts.

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