

Commentary on the Gospel for Mon, Aug 21st 2017

Memorial of Saint Pius X, Pope

The gospel reading from Matthew is the story of the “rich young man” is most challenging. The man comes to Jesus and wants to know what he needs to do to attain eternal life. Jesus counsels that he keeps the commandments. But the man wants to know (or do) more, “All of these I have observed. What do I still lack?” So far, good news! Then comes the questionable if not bad news for the man “go sell what you have and give to the poor” and have treasure in heaven. Unfortunately he responds negatively by going away sad because of his many possessions.

Jesus sees into the man’s soul and discovers over-attachment to his wealth. I would judge the man as a good man because he keeps the commandments, but he cannot go further than that even though he professes greater desires; the desires he has are compromised by his wealth. The many possessions become the deal-breaker between him and Jesus. The man is just too attached to his material wealth and prestige.

He has perfection in his grasp, but he chose otherwise and thus the sadness on his part. As he shambles away from his contact with Jesus we can feel that sadness. I size him up as a good man by his own admission, and serious about his growth. But, in the end he can’t respond positively to Jesus’ recommendations. Might he have re-thought Jesus advice later on? We’ll never know!

The reading from the Book of Judges parallels the gospel story. The Israelites offended God by seeking out and serving the false gods, the Baals and Ashtoroth. Following that, the children of Israel were thrown so far off track that they needed an intervention. When they were oppressed by the peoples around whom they lived, God sent them Judges. A biblical Judge is one who rallies the people against their enemies, saved them from harm. They were also wisdom figures who called them back to honoring their true God, Yahweh.

God sent them Judges to help them get back on track. While the Judges were with them, they returned to their God and avoided the false gods around them. But once the Judge left, they fell back into their former ways (they even got worse!).

The meeting point of the two readings are the idols that both the young man and the Israelites sought after: wealth and false freedom. The readings invite us to look for and deal with the idols that entrap us: wealth; pride; acting as our own little gods; totally focusing on ourselves by keeping others and The Other of little or no consequence; we are concerned only with our own selfish pursuits.

Lord, help me to identify the idols that attract my attention and draw me away from those I love and from you. Give me the eyes and the ears to see you and hear your voice above the static and scramble

of those false gods, the idols that command my attention.

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