

Commentary on the Gospel for Wed, Nov 8th 2017

This gospel passage is not about prudence, no matter what the central section seems to say: it is about total commitment. Jesus begins by asking anyone who would wish to follow him to abandon everything, right down to his wife and children, with no reservations; he says that to do so we must even embrace the Cross, which would seem to be a definite step beyond simply abandoning any sort of attachment or other commitment whatsoever.

And when Jesus returns to this at the end of the passage, saying that we must renounce all that we depend on, he leaves the question open as to just what sort of dependencies that includes. Money, land, family loyalties, and whatever would cause us to be considered wealthy, yes, but beyond that? Our habits, small comforts, repose, food, and air? Yes, we need to be free of such things if they are not directly essential to our continuing in existence, but here we must choose strictly on the basis of whether “having” or not is actually an aid to our following Christ alone and living only in him, purely and completely.

Christ obviously knows that we cannot do this perfectly, now or ever this side of death, but it is still a direction for us and a goal, a rule of thumb for our human tendency to acquire things and to defend ourselves against want and need.

That central section of the Gospel reading then? We do need to examine whether we are capable of undertaking this following of Christ, to evaluate how far we can go --- in at least a first step.

Experience has shown me that I personally can live with and even need a life of simplicity and poverty, that I can abandon my own will if I am putting it in the hands of the Father and asking only that “His will be done, His Kingdom come.” When I do try to live that first stage of following the Lord, I can recommit to him from my new position and understanding, something that I do every morning in prayer, and that thirst for a deeper and purer commitment, for a more generous openness to His direction in the Spirit, is all that I need. I will never live this abandonment as completely as I would like, but under the influence of the Spirit I can grow in that.

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