

## **Twenty-Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time B/2012**

The readings of this Sunday contrast God's wisdom with human wisdom. They show us the various ways that lead to make someone a wise one. They invite us, in particular, to pay attention to the way we live so that we walk in the path of God and come to the discovery of the divine wisdom.

The first reading describes the important choice Solomon made at a crucial moment of his life as a King of Israel. Instead of asking God for riches, health and honor, he prayed that prudence and wisdom may be given to him as he governed God's people. He preferred wisdom to scepter and throne, prudence to gold and silver. But, as he did so, God gave him everything he needed beyond his own expectation.

What is behind this text is the idea that amid the many attractive things of this world, it is useful for the people of God to make a wise and good choice. Such choice can only come from God's wisdom. In that perspective, God's wisdom is more important than human knowledge or riches.

This text helps us understand the drama that surrounds the life of the young man who asks Jesus the question about eternal life. First of all, the Gospel says that, as Jesus was travelling, a man ran up and inquired about what he had to do in order to have eternal life.

In response, Jesus directed him to the observance of God's commandments. As the man reacted that he has kept them since his young age, Jesus invited him to sell everything he had and give them to the poor and follow him. At this, the man left Jesus sad because he was quite rich.

At the view of what happened, Jesus turned to his disciples and stated that it was difficult for the wealthy to enter the kingdom of God. As the disciples were amazed and wondered who could be saved, Jesus insisted that it was easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Continuing to be astonished, Jesus reassured the disciples that what seemed impossible for men was possible for God.

The Gospel ends up with the question of the disciples to Jesus about their own fate as they left everything to follow him. In response, Jesus reassured them about the recompense that awaits them in the present time and in the future as well as about the persecutions that will come upon them.

What do we learn from this Gospel? The first thing we learn is about the drama of being out of touch with spiritual reality. What do I mean by that? For each one of us, indeed, we count our chance for eternal salvation by referring to God's commandments. Once, we are respectful of them and obedient to them, we certainly feel secure about our eternal salvation. That is how the man in the Gospel sees things and he is right to do so.

The problem, however, is that it is not enough to respect the commandments. They should also be applied to the concrete circumstances of life in which we live. To live in the abstract is sometimes beautiful in the sense that it hides from us the difficulties we can encounter when interacting with people, but it does not help us spiritually at all. To live in the abstract is being disconnected with the reality we face on a daily basis. It is

here that the man fails the test, because his conception of salvation is all selfish. Everything is directed on him and for him and never about others.

And yet, the heart of God's commandment is the love of God and the love our fellows. That is why when Jesus asked him to share with others what he had, he felt sad and went away. He would prefer to keep his possessions for himself than to share with others. He forgot that the basic question of Christian life is not only about us; it is also about others. If we live by focusing only on ourselves, we live selfishly. We have also to open our eyes and look around us so that our faith might generate concrete actions for the sake of our fellows.

That is why not to kill is really fine; not to commit adultery is equally fine; not to steal or to bear false witness or to respect the parents is also fine. But, limiting these principles to ourselves without any impact on our relationship with others is like being blind by seeing things only in imagination and without a real link to their concrete materiality. It is for that reason that being generous, compassionate or open to others is as important as obeying the commandments.

The second thing I want to highlight is about the challenge of following Jesus. In fact, to be a disciple is a permanent challenge in order to conform our life to what Jesus requires of us. In fact, Jesus does not call us so that we remain as we are, but rather that we may change in our way of being and living. That is what the man in today's Gospel did not understand. His way of living and thinking was incompatible with Jesus' vision. That the reason why he went away sad as Jesus proposed him another vision of life. That shows that if we go to Jesus with pre-established ideas without the need to change, our relationship with him cannot work.

The same is true about material possessions. In fact, in this Gospel, there is no single condemnation of wealth in itself, but of what people do about it. When Jesus says that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of God, he is drawing our attention to the imprisonment that material possession can create in the hearts of some people.

In fact, material possessions can fix our hearts on this world in such a way that some people think that it is the only reality we have to care for. And yet, there are in the world other values than money and material possessions. After all, there are things that our possessions cannot buy. What about a good marriage, a durable relationship, a wonderful friendship, etc?

Let us ask God for his wisdom so that we come to discern what is pleasing to him. Let us ask him to help us not to become prisoners of material possessions, but rather free men according to his heart. May God bless you all!

### **Wisdom 7:7-11; Hebrews 4: 12-13; Mark 10: 17-30**



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