

Twenty-Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time B/2015

The readings of this Sunday talk about the importance of divine wisdom. They show that only God gives true wisdom that leads to making good choices in life. They invite us to yearn for divine wisdom so that we walk in God's ways and come to our eternal salvation.

The first reading describes the important choice Solomon made at a crucial moment of his life as a King of Israel. It shows how, 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. It shows also that he preferred wisdom to scepter and throne, prudence to gold and silver. Finally, the text shows that as he did so, God gave him everything he needed beyond his own expectation.

What is behind this text is the idea that the attractions of the world are transitory and only God is an eternal value. Another idea is the truth that divine wisdom leads to good choices in life. The last idea relates to the recognition that divine wisdom is more important than human knowledge and riches.

This text allows us to understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus presents the rich man with a difficult choice of abandoning his possessions and following him. First of all, the Gospel starts mentioning the trip of Jesus and the action of the man who inquired about eternal salvation. Then, it gives the response of Jesus who pointed the man to the respect of the commandments. It also gives the reaction of the man who alleged that he has observed the commandments since his youth.

After that, the Gospel talks about the demand of Jesus that the man sell everything he possesses in order to follow him. Then, it gives the reaction of the man who went away sad because of his many possessions. It gives also the reaction of Jesus to the attitude of the man by saying that it is difficult for the one who is rich to enter the Kingdom of heaven.

The Gospel ends up with the question of the disciples to Jesus about their own fate as they left everything to follow him. As a last word, Jesus reassured them about the recompense that awaits them in the present time and in the future of the kingdom of heaven.

What do we learn from today's Gospel? Today I want to talk about the demands of the kingdom of God. What do I mean by that? Let me explain. In fact, when Jesus started his ministry he told people that the kingdom of God was in their midst, they should repent and believe in the Gospel.

From that proclamation, come out two important elements, namely faith in Jesus and repentance. But the kingdom of God in itself is structured around the respect of the Law. That is why for many Israelites, the keeping of God's commandments was a proof of their belonging to God's people and, at the same time, a guarantee for eternal salvation

Without rejecting that vision, however, Jesus will summarize the Law in the love of God and the neighbor. The consequence to draw from such a vision is that instead of limiting the commandments only to dealing with God, it opens up the possibility of looking into the relationships with the fellow human beings.

It is here that the Gospel speaks a lot to us. In fact, when the rich man went to Jesus, he was certainly sure of leading a right life and doing what he thought was right to have eternal salvation. Of course, he had some concerns, but those were not in the sense of doubting about his salvation, but rather in the sense of finding some confirmation that he was in the right direction. That is why he went to inquire from someone he appreciated because he was a good teacher.

However, what he did not know was that up to now, he had been living in a way that he was honoring one dimension of the law, because he was dealing only with God by forgetting his obligations toward his fellow human beings.

That is why when Jesus invited him to sell what he had and give to the poor, he was not happy. At that time, indeed, things became difficult to him because not only his understanding of the law was challenged, but also he never thought that the things he possessed should be given away that way. That is the reason why he went away sad.

From this encounter, let us draw two consequences. First, we should never forget that the heart of God's commandments is the love of God and neighbor. The one cannot exist without the other and vice versa. As 1John 4: 20 says, how can one say that he loves God he does not see while hating a brother he sees? In that sense, any effort of keeping the commandments should always include God and the fellows. That is why we can never love God in the abstract, but always through our brothers and sisters.

Second, because the Law demands that we pay attention to our fellows, our heart should be open to them as well. But, as by instinct we tend to think first of ourselves than others, what is required is repentance and conversion of heart. In that sense, what Jesus wanted that the rich man to do was that he repent and accept the vision of the kingdom he was presenting him.

In other words, if observing the commandment is just abstract without impact in our relationship with others, it serves no purpose. Moreover, Jesus does not call us so that we remain as we are, but that we change. Unfortunately, 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?

But for those who have accepted the wisdom of changing life and following Jesus' vision, they will have their recompense. Let us pray that God may give us the courage to choose Jesus' vision. God bless you all!

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



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