

HOM 28th Sunday B 2021 Oct 10

To gain eternal life, the young man in the Gospel reading was keeping the Ten Commandments but was un-willing to also put aside everything in order to follow Jesus as Peter, Andrew, James, John, Matthew, and the other apostles had done. He declined Jesus' invitation to join Him and went away sad, we are told, because he had many possessions.

There is a teaching in this Gospel event that is all too easy to miss: keeping the Ten Commandments is not enough to get to heaven. It is necessary but not sufficient. Something more is also needed. Jesus tells the young man, who is keeping the Ten Commandments: "*You are lacking in one thing.*" As I like to put it: keeping the Ten Commandments will get us to Purgatory, but Heaven requires us to also fulfill the Two Great Commandments which are: 1) To love God with all one's heart, mind, soul and strength, and 2) to love our neighbor as ourselves.

Practically speaking, what does that mean? Well, I tell the children preparing for the sacraments of Confession and Holy Communion to look at our crucifix in order to see what fulfilling the Two Great Commandments looks like. That's because, Jesus fulfilled the Two Great Commandments.

He loves God the Father with all his heart, mind, soul, and strength because He does the Father's will unto the Cross – unto suffering and death. Doing God's will is the only way we can love Him. We love other people by seeking their true good, but God is already good. In fact, God alone is good – the source of all goodness -- as Jesus pointed out to that young man to help him recognize Him as God. In truth, God is all-good. He is perfect, and so we love God, not by seeking His good, but doing his will which is for our good and the good of our neighbor.

On the Cross, Jesus is also fulfilling the second great commandment *to love one's neighbor as oneself*. He is laying down His life so that you and I and all the willing can share His divinity – His divine glory – according to the Father's will. He is loving us as He loves Himself.

All of this began long before Calvary, however, when Jesus consented to His Father's will to become one of us by way of His Incarnation. In doing this, He humbled Himself to share in our humanity, that we might share His divinity. He put aside everything including the riches of His divine majesty to do the Father's will and so to save us: As St. Paul put it in his Letter to the Philippians (2: 6-8):

Christ Jesus, Who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to cling to. Rather, He emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and, found human in appearance, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.

So, Jesus, embraced the poverty of our human condition to gain divine riches for us. And that's what He was inviting the young man in the Gospel reading to do **with** Him – to love God and neighbor as He has. But, the young man preferred his earthly possessions and riches to eternal life and heavenly riches. *A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush*, the saying goes. He just could not bring himself to do God's will in this matter. In a way, he is like the man whose

skeletal remains were found in what was once his home following a nearby volcanic eruption. He had been guarding his bags of gold coins with rifle in hand, refusing to evacuate, when molten lava all but consumed him alive. What good did his gold do him?

Jesus uses this encounter with the young man to teach His apostles that the love of money is a major obstacle when it comes to entering into the Kingdom of God. He could have named other obstacles, too: e.g., love of power, love of pleasure, love of comfort, love of prestige, love of human approval, love of one's own plans, love of one's own will. That's really the bottom line – wanting what we want for ourselves and others more than wanting what God's wants for us and others, even though, in the end, what God wants for us is so much more – infinitely greater and better – than what we want for ourselves and others – namely, a share in His divine glory forever.

And even in the meantime – even on the way there to eternal life – what God wants for us is more and better than what we could otherwise have apart from Him and the Father's will. Jesus assures Peter of this who wants to know what he and the other apostles can expect for having put everything aside to follow Him. Jesus answers:

“Amen, I say to you, there is no one who has given up house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands for my sake and for the sake of the gospel who will not receive a hundred times more now in this present age: houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions and eternal life in the age to come.”

What Jesus does not mention among the blessings received by doing God's will with Him in this present age is the surely the best one of all, namely, His friendship, which carries with it peace beyond understanding and joy no one can take away. The apostles had that, even when they went to their deaths.

But the young man who walked away was sad. We can be sure, however, that his sadness would give way to gladness the moment his heart turned back to the Lord with a humble plea for mercy – that the Lord allow him to serve another way – and he sets out joyfully by a different route toward the cross of obedience and love to fulfill the Great Commandments of love. Or maybe, that gladness would come at the end of his life when standing before the Lord to render an account, he consented to doing the Father's will with Jesus by way of fruitful suffering in Purgatory.

In any case, brothers and sisters, all ways to eternal life go through Calvary, offering Jesus to the Father with Mary AND offering ourselves to and with Jesus to the Father's will, with Mary's help, for the life of the world. May we hold this bit of wisdom more precious than countless riches. May we live by it each day – our faces set like flint – amidst the confusion that surrounds us – that swirls through the culture – and sometimes even into the church. And may we renew it at this and every Mass by praying these words silently and sincerely at Holy Communion: I AM ALL YOURS O MOST LOVING JESUS THROUGH MARY YOUR MOTHER WITH THE HELP OF ST. JOSEPH.