



## CATHOLIC CONVERSATIONS ON THE SCRIPTURES

Archdiocese of Miami - Ministry of Christian Formation

October 11, 2015

Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time

### Gospel reading Mark 10:17-30 [To be read aloud]

As Jesus was setting out on a journey, a man ran up, knelt down before him, and asked him, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus answered him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: *You shall not kill; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; you shall not defraud; honor your father and your mother.*" He replied and said to him, "Teacher, all of these I have observed from my youth." Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said to him, "You are lacking in one thing. Go, sell what you have, and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." At that statement his face fell, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions. Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!"

The disciples were amazed at his words. So Jesus again said to them in reply, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! 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." They were exceedingly astonished and said among themselves, "Then who can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "For human beings it is impossible, but not for God. All things are possible for God." Peter began to say to him, "We have given up everything and followed you." Jesus said, "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."

### Brief commentary:

What does it mean to follow Jesus Christ? This is one of the great themes of the gospels and of the whole of the New Testament. What does it mean for Christians today to follow Jesus in our society, with its challenges and potentials? This is the issue that is at the center of today's gospel reading. How much is Jesus worth following? What does a person need to leave behind so as to be free to follow Jesus radically? The readings begin with the writer of the book of Wisdom expressing, in the literary tradition of *persona Solomonica* (to whom was traditionally attributed the lore of Israelite wisdom), the priceless value of wisdom. The author, in the literary custom of personifying wisdom as feminine, exclaims that, "riches meant nothing in comparison to her" because "all good things came to [him] in her company." The psalmist likewise calls on God to "teach us to number our days, that we may gain wisdom of heart." For its part, the letter to the Hebrews exalts the inscrutable wisdom of the Word of God, which is "living and effective...and able to discern the thoughts of the heart." In the gospel the choice between riches and Christ, who is the Wisdom of God made flesh, is likewise posed not only to the rich and ethical man, but also to us the hearers/readers. The enthusiastic rich man approaches Jesus – whom he has high regard for as a teacher of wisdom – willing to follow whatever moral/ethical prescription would assure a more enduring inheritance, eternal life. Jesus points out what the fundamental duties to God and neighbor are, as expressed in the commandments. Unsatisfied with Jesus' response, he realizes that he has a greater potential than 'not causing harm'. As Augustine later would point out about the commandments, "to be free from theft, murder, adultery, covetousness, are the *beginning* of freedom," but they are not the culmination of the human potential to love. Mark tells us that what Jesus then recommended to the man he did so "looking at him with love": Jesus invited him to take a great risk, and to do so daringly, radically, generously by 'putting all his eggs in one basket', staking it all, investing himself totally – just as Jesus himself and his disciples had done – for the sake of the poor and of the kingdom of God. Mark tells us that, in contrast to his earlier excitement, the rich man's face fell and "he went away sad, for he had many possessions." In a way, 'all that he owned him', and he felt that such a request to be beyond his possibilities. On that day he may have thought that his possessions would endure; yet, eventually – twenty centuries ago – he had to leave them behind. Our only real possession is ourselves, and only in love, faith and hope can we offer who we *are* and what we *have* in true service of God and neighbor. Today, Jesus' message resounds powerfully in the witness and message of Pope Francis and of so many Christians – laity, missionaries, clergy – who daily go through the eye of the needle by putting themselves and their resources at the service of our neighbors in need and of the Gospel. For Jesus people come first; to be generous with our gifts on behalf of our sister and brother is the path of the most authentic Christian discipleship. It is not enough to avoid doing harm, we must truly put ourselves out there – heart, soul, creativity, talents, time, treasures – investing these in caring for others, in imitation of him who gave all for us in a life and death of total loving service. In this lie the greatest ethics, the greatest wisdom, and the greatest human potential.

### Today's reading offers significant messages:

- Our hearts tell us that we have a much higher potential than the acquisition of wealth, status, power, influence, fame, ease, and pleasure. Our only possession is ourselves and we can give ourselves on behalf of others only through faith, hope and love.
- The commandments offer us the basic responsibilities toward God and our neighbor, but we are to go further. Jesus is the representative of the best of humanity, the one whom we can follow if we are willing to take the risk of faith in loving service to others, with the confident hope that our gifts and efforts will by the grace of Spirit bear fruit.
- Today Christian discipleship is expressed in many diverse ways – in families, communities, ministries, national and international – by serving people in need with the love of Jesus Christ.

### For our shared or personal reflection:

*After a brief pause for silent reflection share your answers, ideas or feelings.*

- What gifts do I put in the service of my neighbors in need?
- How do the commandments guide me? Why are they important?
- What treasures do I value most? Where is my heart? How radically do I follow Jesus?