

TWENTY EIGHTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (10/10-11/2009)

Wisdom 7/7-11, Psalm 90, Hebrews 4/12-13, Mark 10/17-30

Honestly now, do you really feel that Jesus should be the most important person in your life? Maybe you shouldn't go any further in this essay till you answer that for yourself. What place does Jesus have in your life?

In today's Gospel passage, an enthusiastic young man comes to Jesus seeking the way to eternal life; apparently he believes Jesus can point out the way.

So the Lord proceeds to tell him what he needs to do to inherit eternal life.

Obviously, Jesus points out, the man has to keep the commandments.

"Teacher, all of these I have observed from my youth."

The man's intentions are good, and Jesus sees that; the Scripture says. *"Jesus, looking at him, loved him."* Fine, he's off to a good start.

Now, go and sell what you have, give it to the poor and then come and follow Jesus!

I do not know if Jesus was surprised by the man's response to this shocking bit of advice.

My guess would be that Jesus had encountered well-meaning, but reluctant, people before.

But this young man *"went away sad, for he had many possessions."*

We might feel sorry for the young man, but should we?

After all, he is a man of the world, making a success out of his life.

Why should he give it all up to follow even someone as awesome as Jesus?

The cynic might say, "If you're going to give it all up, give it to me!"

Lots of us would be there to pick up the pieces.

I don't think most of us are ready for this tale of the young man.

Jesus asks too much, but he does not back down.

He goes on to say that it is extremely difficult for people (the rich) who are caught up in this world's goods to open themselves fully to the invitation of the Kingdom.

Like a camel through the eye of a needle! Do you follow his reasoning?

His apostles didn't, for it was common wisdom that the rich were specially blessed by God.

Remember the words of Reb Tevye, the poor dairy farmer, in the musical, *Fiddler on the Roof*?

"If I were a rich man..." and then he sings along telling God that he wouldn't mind being rich.

It would make life a lot easier.

That's how we all think, but Jesus has other ideas.

He understands the seductiveness of riches, how they can make us feel in control, independent of any reliance on God.

Most of us are not called to divest ourselves of all our earthly riches, but we are reminded today that material goods can be an obstacle to our relationship with the Lord.

In the end, we have to be prudent and wise in our use of riches.

We live in one of the richest countries in the world; it's unrealistic to expect people to be willing to give all that away to follow Jesus.

Really?