

TRINITY 19/ORD 28
Wisdom 7:7-11
Heb 4:12-13
Mk 10:17-30

It doesn't matter whether a bird is snared by a thin twine or a thick rope, it still cannot fly. Today's readings focus on what prevents us from living as a true disciple. In today's first reading, Solomon recalls the choice he made when God offered to give him whatever he asked for. He chose wisdom rather than riches or power. Making good choices such as this one leads us into glorious unity with God whose very word is wisdom.

The Epistle to the Hebrews fuses together three ways that God speaks to us. He speaks through Jesus the incarnate word. He speaks through Scripture the written word, and through the spoken word. In today's gospel reading, a rich man was challenged by Jesus the incarnate word, his spoken word and the written word of Scripture.

The man who approached Jesus seems to believe that entering into God's rest which is eternal life is somehow related to living a good life of moral and religious obedience. He tries to flatter Jesus by kneeling before him and calling him 'good.' Jesus doesn't bend to flattery so tells him that only God is good, and to inherit eternal life he needs to observe God's written word in the Commandments. The man replies that he had observed them all his life but it isn't enough. There must be something more, so if Jesus told him what he needed to do, he would do it.

Jesus knew the man was desperate to walk the path of righteousness so he spoke God's word in love to him. He said that to enter into God's rest it is necessary to give up or cut out whatever or whoever gets in the way of our relationship with God. Unlike Solomon, what was blocking the rich man was not so much his possessions but what those possessions meant to him. They possessed him because they were a visible sign to the world of his goodness and blessings and therefore his status in God's eyes. Jews believed that God rewards faithful observant Jews so the rich were blessed. In the Musical, 'Fiddler on the Roof,' Tevye asks God to make him rich so he sings that,

"The most important men in town would come to fawn on me, They would ask me to advise them Like Solomon the Wise.... And it won't make one bit of difference if I answer right or wrong, When you are rich, they think you really know."

Once again, Jesus shatters such illusions. He tells the rich man to become like a child who had no status, wealth or recognition. Jesus didn't ask the man to put his possessions into storage or pawn them and come and see whether he had what it takes to inherit eternal life. He told him to give them away to the poor so there would be no prospect of his being able to reclaim them. The rich man trusted in his wealth but was less confident about trusting Jesus whom he regarded as a teacher. How could he possibly abandon the blessings God had shown him? For Jesus the only way to possess everything is to be possessed by nothing.

The disciples were flabbergasted to hear that those who trusted in riches would find it hard to enter the Kingdom of God. Yet with God nothing is impossible. When Jesus healed the sick, disabled and sinners he demanded a transformation of the lives of those who had been liberated. Jesus offered this rich man freedom from the bondage that his wealth was to him, but he preferred the security of bondage to the insecurity of freedom with Jesus.

So for us to inherit God's Kingdom, what does Jesus ask of us. As I have mentioned one song I'll end with another, but take it out of its context of a jilted lover and apply the words to how we approach God.

"I, I who have nothing
I, I who have no one
Adore you and want you so
I'm just a no one, with nothing to give you
But oh
I love you

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