

“What Must I Do to Inherit Eternal Life?”

Mark 10:23-31

What we hear in our Gospel lesson today is a continuation of what we heard last week. There was a rich young man who asked Jesus the wrong question. He asked, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus replies, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.”

This young man thought that he was good on his own and that he could do enough to inherit eternal life – basically saying that he didn’t need to be saved. When Jesus listed the commandments, “Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false witness, do not defraud, honor your father and mother”, the young man said, “All these I have kept from my youth.” He was proud to say that he was good. But Jesus had just said, “No one is good except God alone.” This rich young man was essentially saying that he was his own god.

Then Jesus says, “You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.” And the man went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

Now, in reality, all that was needed to inherit eternal life was the final statement: "Come, follow Me." However, for that to happen, the rich young man had to get past his trust in his personal wealth and his trust in his personal works. Jesus said what he did for a reason. He had to break down this man's misguided trust, because he trusted in something other than God's mercy when it comes to finding the path to eternal life. He trusted in himself.

In today's Gospel, we hear how Jesus used this as an object lesson for His disciples. Time and again, Jesus warns His disciples about the deceitfulness of wealth. Having wealth is not the problem. The problem comes when a person does not have a proper understanding of the burden that comes with having been blessed with an overabundance of possessions.

As Jesus says elsewhere, with those who have been given much, much more will be demanded. And that is true in regard to money, possessions, talent, time; all that we have is a gift from God which we are to use to His glory and for the furthering of His kingdom.

Jesus is not suggesting that we sell everything that we own, give it away, and go off to some monastery. The church went through that period and it was not very beneficial for the spread of the Gospel. However, how

we use our gifts; how we use our talents; what kind of stewards we are of the blessings we have received; this does matter.

The intentional nature of our how we return thanks to God speaks volumes about our attitude toward who we believe the owner of our life and our possessions truly is. As we just sang, “We give Thee but Thine own . . . all that we have is Thine alone, a trust O Lord from Thee.” This is why tithing has always been a good guideline. It makes us think about who is truly the owner of what we have.

When Jesus tells His disciples that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God, He is warning them against placing their trust in themselves or in their possessions or comforts of life. Satan is very crafty. It is so easy to seek and find hope and peace in the comfortable life.

Be honest with yourself. I know that in my sinful nature, I read those words that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God, but I sure would like to try.

How many of you just know you would be happier if you were holding the winning \$868 million dollar Megamillion lottery ticket? The deceitfulness of the love of money is that there is only one answer to the question “how much is enough?” The answer our Old Adam gives is

always “just a little more.” That is what Solomon was saying in our Old Testament lesson.

How often have you said to yourself, “If only I had ‘this’, then I would be happy.”? And you get “this” and realize very soon thereafter that it was unsatisfying. Placing your faith in the comfortable life you have or the comfortable life you think you should have makes entering eternal life very difficult.

The disciples understood what Jesus was saying and they ask a very appropriate question, “Who then can be saved?” And Jesus gives an appropriate answer, “With man this is impossible, but not with God. All things are possible with God.”

The mercy and grace of God is the only path to eternal life. It is not found in your goodness. It is not found in your keeping the commandments. That is simply you exercising the faith that God has created in you. Those are thank offerings for the forgiveness of sins which you have already received in faith.

“What must I do to inherit eternal life?” It has already been done. Christ took care of that at the cross and the grave. He says, “Come, follow Me.” Rejoice in the mercy and grace of God. It is the greatest and most priceless treasure the world has ever known. And you already possess it. Amen.