

14th October 2018 (28th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B)

Wisdom 7:7-11; Psalm 89(90):12-17; Hebrews 4:12-13; Mark 10:17-30.

Come follow me!

Indeed, why is it easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to participate in the kingdom of God?! Some people have tried to explain that the 'eye of a needle' is some rock formation that is extremely difficult for camels to walk through; or that the 'camel' is a type of rope that has to be threaded through the eye of the needle. In this case I prefer to read the metaphor used by Jesus very literally: it is indeed very difficult for a person with great wealth to participate in the kingdom of God! Why?

This happens to be a very challenging and slightly complicated text to read. Firstly, Jesus does not condemn wealth or those who are wealthy. The basic faith filled response to participate in the kingdom of God – or eternal life, as the man calls it – is to live out the commandments. It is interesting that Jesus only lists the commandments that require respect of neighbour. Jesus is asking the man to 'love your neighbour as yourself!'

The young man is not satisfied with this response and wants to enter into a deeper relationship with Jesus, hence the question: what else can I do? Jesus looks at this man steadily and loves him. This is a very strange comment as Jesus loves all of us and not only this man. In this case Jesus welcomes the man's willingness to go deeper into his relationship with God and is ready to give him his answer, a special call.

Each one of us is called to a particular way of life, some are called to the single life of service to humanity, others are called to be parents and educators, others are called to go out and proclaim the good news. Each call has different requirements. In the case of this man Jesus is inviting him, like he did the twelve apostles, to 'come follow me.' To preach the good news in the style adopted by Jesus one is required to get rid of his wealth and commit himself totally to this ministry. For the man this was a step too far, and went away sad. In the depth of his heart he probably would have loved to follow Jesus more closely, but was too attached to his wealth. Jesus does not condemn the man. Jesus calls us and leaves us free to accept or reject his invitation.

From this incident Jesus draws out two teachings. Firstly it is very difficult for anyone to truly follow Christ and be fully committed to one's wealth. This is not because wealth is evil, at no stage does Jesus condone poverty; very often we can observe that a person with great wealth becomes very attached to his property and finds it difficult to live the Christian life fully, loving his neighbour as himself. One of the great drivers in society is not love and respect of neighbour, but economic growth! The Christian is invited to reach out to those in need, to share one's wealth with those less fortunate and to assist any who require help. For a wealthy person to be able to participate in the kingdom of God, one needs to learn to place God first in his life and then everything else follows.

The second teaching is the fact that what is impossible for man, is possible for God! The rich man had asked what could *He* do to enter the kingdom of God. Jesus answered that there is nothing anyone could do; the kingdom of God (salvation) is a gift freely given by God to all of us and nothing we can do can make us good enough to earn us entry into this kingdom. What is impossible for us humans, is possible for God and has indeed been achieved through Christ on the cross. All that is left for us now is to love our neighbour and to live according to God's will in our life, following Jesus in faith.

The invitation to follow Jesus more closely is given to all of us, how do I commit myself to this call?

Fr Mario