

Connecting With the Sunday Readings

Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time

There is a story told about an unsuccessful Arctic expedition made by a group of English explorers. One of the problems they faced was that they carried a large amount of supplies with them as they trekked across the desolate snow and ice-covered landscape. Later it was learned that among their possessions was a large silver service and enough delicate china for a large number of people. Their problem is obvious. Travel light. Your chances of a successful trip are better. That might be a way of looking at how to live out the message of today's Gospel reading.

Attachment and detachment are attitudes and habits of the heart for disciples. We should be attached to God and what God's will is for us. The rest we wear lightly like a loose garment. Being unencumbered with earthly possessions allows one greater freedom to connect with God. Material possessions are not bad or evil in themselves but they have a way of demanding our time, our thoughts, and our energy, and we become diverted from what is really important in life.

A Gospel Word for the Home

Mark 10:17-30

The story of the rich man who came to Jesus seeking a better way of life for himself is one of the most memorable stories in the Gospel. Maybe that's because most of us can easily identify with this good-hearted man who really wanted to do more but realized the invitation to sell all that he had, and give the money to the poor, was just too difficult. Actually the rich man is only one part of today's Gospel reading. There are two other parts. First, there was Jesus teaching his disciples how difficult it is for a rich man to enter the Kingdom. Second, there was his teaching about the rewards of giving up riches, after Peter says "...we have left everything and followed you."

Jesus looked on the man with love. He was obviously moved by the man's willingness and sincerity and so he extended the invitation to become a disciple. It is important to understand that in Jewish religious culture, wealth was seen as a sign of God's favor, and with it came an obligation to give alms to the poor—which was an honor. Part of the man's dilemma was that to follow Jesus' invitation he would have to give up not only his possessions but also the privilege of giving alms. It would make him absolutely and totally dependent on God. It was too hard.

In his instruction to the disciples they are amazed not so much at the image of the camel and the needle but that Jesus is pulling the rug out from under the idea that having riches is a sign of God's favor. That would be an amazing statement for them. They thought for sure the **rich** would be saved!

The other amazing part of the conversation was Jesus' response to Peter when he says that the rewards to those who do follow his invitation will be great not just in the next world but here and now. They are the riches of the rewards of living in community with other disciples. They are the riches you often experience as a parent and family member.

Thought for the Week

We live in a very materialistic and consumer-driven society. This is fairly obvious. We equate the very concept of success with wealth and possessions, just as the rich man and the Apostles did. People work very hard to acquire "the better things of life." At least, that's what the marketers try to convince us to do. There's also the notion of "conspicuous consumption." That's when people want to show others their wealth. All of this is true, but once again, there are other ways to look at all of this.

Look at possessions from the perspective of freedom. Are we tied down or tied up by our possessions? And, are they ours because they help us do God's work in the world and in our families? Do they free us up to be good parents or to respond to the many requests for help that come our way? That seems to be what Jesus was pointing to: freedom to love and serve!

—by David Thomas, PhD, Co-Director, The Bethany Family Institute

Parent Survival

The decision we make to become a parent is clearly one of the most significant ones we make in our lives. This includes the awesome decision to adopt a child needing parents and a family. Once this decision reaches its full import, everything changes. For some, it means a loss of freedom.

But freedom is one of the multi-faceted realities that can tie us in knots trying to gain its illusive blessings. For to be free does not mean we can do whatever we please. It means the capacity of doing what is best for ourselves and for others. While it's not apparent on the surface, parents may be among those who experience a huge measure of freedom because they are involved in exactly what they do want in their lives. In their decision to serve God through parenting, they have freedom.

Car or Meal Talk

How do we see our culture being too materialistic?

One-Line Prayer

God of love, give us a generous heart and the freedom to live with great love for others. Amen.