



A Word for Sunday

Father Albert Shamon

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Mark 10:17-30; (R1) Wisdom 7:7-11; (R2) Hebrews 4:12-13.

Sunday's gospel is what Vincent Taylor calls a pronouncement story: that is, a story that leads up to a saying or pronouncement of Jesus. The story is about a rich young man who comes to Jesus seeking wisdom (R1). The young man asks, "What must I do to share in everlasting life?"

That was an odd question for a Jew to ask, for Jews believed that everlasting life was granted to all who followed the Law of the Two Ways: to love God (Deuteronomy 6:5), and to love neighbor (Leviticus 19:18).

Apparently, following the Two Ways had left the young man empty. He was attracted to Jesus, for he went to Him; he admired Jesus, for he knelt to Him and addressed Him with fulsome praise "Good Teacher." Since Jews viewed only God as good, Jesus asked the young man what he meant by calling Him "good." Jesus refused to ascribe to Himself any good that was independent of His Father, just as a saint might say: "Not I, but Christ."

Then Jesus made His pronouncement: "There is one thing more you must do. Go and sell what you have and give to the poor; you will then have treasure in heaven."

In other words, the way to life everlasting is to put total trust in Jesus and not in wealth. Like a summer shower, the young man's initial enthusiasm dried up, and "he went away sad" — the saddest verse in the four gospels, for nowhere else do we read of anyone's refusing a call by Jesus to follow Him. Still, the young man's action is so human. We cannot afford to throw a stone at him. How often we fall short of what Christ's Church asks of us!

Jesus' answer transcends the precepts of the Decalogue. These are negative: not killing, not stealing. Jesus' command is positive: love one's neighbor, not by not doing, but by doing, by sharing one's goods with the needy. Jesus did not propose Two Ways: one way, to keep commandments common to all Christians, and a second way — this one peculiar to an elite group called to a more perfect way — to sell all and give to the poor. All the disciples of Jesus must show concern for the poor.

The rich young man's departure is a dramatic witness of how riches can come between man and the following of Christ. Francis Bacon, in his essay "On Riches," called riches "the baggage of virtue." The Roman word for army baggage is *impedimenta*. "As baggage is to an army, so is riches to virtue. It cannot be spared nor left behind, but it hindereth the march; yea, and the care of it sometimes loseth or disturbeth the victory."

Bacon echoed our Lord's pronouncement, when he wrote, "It is easier for a camel to pass through a needle's eye than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God."

Ancient cities usually had two gates: a large one, opened all day long and securely closed at sunset; and a small one (about four feet by eight feet) that could be opened easily to let in latecomers. This small gate had a rounded arch on top that shaped it like a needle's eye. The Easterner's love of imagery produced such names for this type of gate as "needle gates." Only with great difficulty could a camel with packs on its back be squeezed through a needle gate.

St. Thomas defined sanctity in two words: *firmitas* and *munditia* — attachment and detachment, or attachment to Jesus and detachment from things. Poison in a bottle is harmless; in the bloodstream, it will kill. So possessions are all right until they possess the heart.

How grateful we ought to be for such things as Sunday collections and Thanks Giving Appeals! God, who fed 5,000 with five loaves, does not need our money to run His Church, but He makes her stand in need of us simply to give us the opportunity to become detached from our money — the impediment to virtue.

St. Paul wrote to Timothy: "We brought nothing into this world, nor have we power to take anything out." (There are no U-hauls, in other words, behind hearses.)

Those who want to be rich are falling into temptation, and a trap. "The love of money (not money, but the love of it) is the root of all evils" (1 Timothy 6:7, 9-10).

"When we die we leave behind all we have and take with us all we are." This is the prudence the author of Wisdom prayed for!

Vocations

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Haehl believes celibacy continues to be an important witness — to give up a human right to a loving relationship and children and to express that love in a different way. "You don't love any less, just a little differently," he explained.

Garcia agrees that priests can be more available to people by not having their own families, but added that he views celibacy as a man-made structure. "I believe a person

can be called to priesthood and marriage," he said. "Men need intimacy, and celibacy deprives them of that in some way, at some level."

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On the Right Side

Father Paul J. Cuddy



Nuns get a fridge

From Bishop Raphael Ndigni, Kenya

"Thank you for your check. I have taken the liberty to use \$500 to buy a fridge for the native sisters' convent in our diocese — Longonot. The parish is between Najuru and Nairobi — started in 1983. Last year, I persuaded the Assumption Sisters of Nairobi, a native congregation, to come to work there. One is a nurse in a local dispensary. Another is a primary school teacher. The other is a nurse doing mobile clinic immunization and general preventive medicine. I managed to build a prefab house. The area is rather remote and backward.

"Last Sunday I was at the parish and we got a piece of meat from somebody. I gave it to the sisters, but they could not keep it because they had no fridge. When I returned to Nakuru, I received your letter and check, and bought a fridge for the sisters. I hope you approve of the decision."

Comment:

Many years ago, I resolved to give to charity at least an equal amount as I would spend on pleasures — vacations, restaurants, etc. This is less noble than it seems since I do not have a wife or family to support, and the missions are "family" to me. Imagine what that fridge means to the sisters. In 1984, while in Kenya, Fathers Heisel, Wohlrab and I went to the boondocks to visit Sacred Heart Sister Rosemary Statt, sister of Father Thomas Statt of Mother of Sorrows, Rochester. She is the superior of a convent of Sacred Heart sisters, six in number, who care for 500 high school boys and girls, all boarders in a school that the natives would consider rather elite, and our youngsters would shudder at for its primitive dormitories and meals. The convent itself is quite primitive, and I often think uneasily of the difference between our rectories and convents and those we visited in Africa.

Bishop Ndigni continued his letter to me: "The other half of the check is for 50 Masses you requested. We thank you sincerely for your support and encouragement in our work."

Comment:

Mass intention stipends are part of the support of the priest celebrant. Since I say Mass for other people's intentions, I send an occasional large stipend to missionaries. This is an important part of their sustenance. If on occasions of a death some people have so many Masses that cannot be cared for in the parish, it would be good to ask the pastor to send

some to the Propagation of the Faith for missionaries, or to Fathers Kraft and Welch or Bishop Ndigni. Archbishop Sheen once said when there was a discussion of dropping Mass intentions: "Fathers, many missionaries are dependent on Mass stipends for their livelihood. They may not be important to you. They are to them."

Bishop Ndigni's letter continued: The Eucharistic Congress in Nairobi was a great success, and we all thank God it went so well. Please give my regards to Father Joe Hart, and tell him that today all theologians need "Sentire con Ecclesia" (to think, feel, be with the Church). Otherwise, we are building on sand ..."

Comment:

Father Hart is a Rochester theologian. When he was studying in Rome, he was sent to Kenya and spent two weeks with Bishop Ndigni. They are good friends. TIME magazine (August 26), observing Pope John Paul's recent trip to seven countries in Africa, said: "John Paul's grueling tour is part of a long-range effort to strengthen Rome's spiritual ties with the important African Church." Many American theologians and laity are working to weaken our ties with the Holy Father and Rome. The church in Africa is strong for standing fast, to "holding the traditions you have learned, whether by work or by our epistles" (2 Thessalonians 2:14) and is beautifully loyal to the Holy Father and Rome. I hope some black Newmans will evolve from Africa to strengthen the Church.



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