

Father O'Connor's Homily for 13 October 2024
Twenty-Eighth Ordinary Sunday – B

Wisdom 7: 7-11
Hebrews 4: 12-13
Mark 10: 17-30

When I was growing up, I would often hear my mother say, “Now stand up tall, pull your shoulders back and hold your head up high, because good posture says a lot about the person inside.”

Well, it's true. Our body language does reveal a lot about what is going on inside of us. And today's Gospel scene from Mark [about “*a man*”] – which is also recounted in Matthew 19: 16-22 [“*the young man*”] and in Luke 18: 18-23 [“*a rich ruler*”] – is a case in point.

“As Jesus was setting out on a journey, a [rich young] man ran up and knelt down before Him.” It is important to note how the man came: **he came running, and he flung himself at Jesus' feet.** There is something unusual about this young aristocrat falling at the feet of the penniless prophet from Nazareth.

And then the young man asks, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?”

And Jesus answers, “Keep the commandments.” And then He lists six of them.

The man replies, “Teacher, all of these I have observed from my youth.” Notice that all the commandments that Jesus quoted, except for one – “Honor your father and your mother” – began with the words, “You shall not.”

In effect, the young man was saying, “Never in my life have I done harm to anyone.” That was probably true. But the real question of Jesus was, “What good have you done?” Respectability, by and large, consists in not doing bad things. Discipleship, on the other hand, consists in doing good things.

Then the Gospel says that “Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said to him, ‘You are lacking in one thing. Go, sell what you have, and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow Me.’”

“At that statement **his face fell**, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions.” Poor posture – “his face fell.” You can picture him walking away, a bit hunched over because of his sadness. His body language revealed the struggle that was going on inside of him.

Jesus was confronting this young man with an essential question: “Do you really want to be my disciple? Do you want it badly enough to give your possessions away?”

And the man answered, in effect, “I do want it. But not that badly.” It was the malady of “not wanting it badly enough” which meant tragedy for the young man who had, at first, come running to Jesus and knelt down before Him. It is a malady that we can suffer from too. We all want to be disciples, but do we “want it badly enough” to pay the price – whatever that price may be in each of our lives?

This Gospel is not simply about money. Its message is about really wanting to be a disciple of Jesus. There are any number of obstacles that can get in the way. For the rich young man, his obstacle was “the stuff” that he owned. And so he went away sad.

Do you consider yourself wealthy? I would imagine that if I were to ask all the wealthy people in this church to stand up right now, everyone would remain seated. Why? Because “being wealthy” is relative. No matter how much we have, we can always think of someone that we think has more than we do.

But try to tell a homeless person that you have nothing to share because you are too poor. Do you think that homeless person would believe you? After all, we all have a place to call home, we all have food for the day, and none of us is wearing right now every item of clothing that we own.

We do need money to take care of our needs. Yet money alone does not give us full security in life. But sometimes we try to live as though it did.

That was the trouble with the rich young man in the Gospel. He not only owned things, but his possessions actually owned him. He could not let go of them long enough to open his hand to the outstretched hand of Jesus.

What if this Gospel had ended differently? What if that rich young man had said, “Yes, Jesus. I really want to follow you and I am willing to do whatever it takes. Just give me a little time and I will go home and put everything on the market and give the proceeds to the poor. Please keep my spot open as your disciple. I promise you, I will be right back.”

If he had said this, he would have walked away with a smiling face – and not a sad one – standing up tall with his shoulders back and his head held high, because Jesus was calling him to become something more, and he really wanted that badly what Jesus was offering him that day.

Jesus looks upon us with love too. What might Jesus be asking of you so that you can become an even better disciple this week? Don't be afraid to ask Him. Because you can count on Jesus for the grace to do it.

Lord, deliver us from the malady of "not wanting it badly enough." And fill us with the holy desire of really wanting to grow as the beloved disciples that you invite us and enable us to become.