

## **Twenty-Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

**October 11, 2009**

**Homily of Anthony T. Padovano**

**Mark 10:17-31**

**Call to Community**

Let us look at three themes from today's Gospel: psychology, reversals, redemption.

### **1. Psychology**

The Gospel is often psychologically charged. Notice the sharp exchanges that are going on here. Jesus is getting ready to set out on a journey when a young man kneels before him and asks, not for a healing, but for an answer to a question that is tormenting him: What must I do to inherit eternal life?

Something about him rubs Jesus the wrong way, as we say. Maybe the kneeling is a bit excessive. Perhaps the greeting he gives, "good teacher" is a bit overdone or stagey. His whole manner appears theatrical and just possibly manipulative.

Jesus is dismissive. "Don't call me good, call God good. In any case, keep the commandments. You know them." A sharp reply!

Something about that rejection brings the man to a moment of authenticity. Now he says, "Teacher" (not "good teacher"), I do keep the commandments and I need something more in my life."

Jesus now sees a genuine spirit in him. This scene is touching. Jesus looks at him a moment and loves this petitioner.

"You do need more", Jesus says. "You need to get beyond money. You're addicted to it. You're defined by it. The money and your desire for it are suffocating your life, killing your spirit. Give it away or you will lose the meaning of your life. And come follow me. Be part of what I am trying to do. Come into a deeper calling, a better life."

The Gospel describes the psychology of the man carefully. He is "shocked" and goes away "grieving." He knows Jesus is right but he just cannot live without a lot of money. He

chooses a lesser life even though he feels the call, deep in his soul, to something more magnanimous and meaningful. He settles for a loss in his life. We never hear of him again.

## **2. Reversals**

Jesus is reversing the canons of Jewish spirituality of his day. Judaism, at this time, equated riches with God's favor. Jesus says that community is a sign of God's favor, not wealth.

Jesus feels the loss of the man who has just walked away. He feels it so deeply that he makes excessive statements about wealth. "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." Jesus does not mean this literally and the early Christian community knew this. He is responding to the calling this one man had, an individual case. The early Christian community sees this dramatic saying as a way of making a point, not a commandment. Wealthy people, after all, supported Jesus and later Paul and many Christians, with their wealth and their homes. But they did this with the risk of losing everything as the more conservative Jewish establishment and the persecuting Romans rejected what Jesus and his community were doing. They kept their money but also their convictions and commitments. They made money, second in their lives and the kingdom first.

The remarks continue with the last sentence, "Many who are first will be last." Jesus is more measured here. Not "all" who are first but "many" will be last. The kingdom is available to those who are first and succeed in life. But only if they are first by not making being first in their lives, by not clinging to the secular success they have.

## **3. Redemption**

Now Jesus goes deeper. The disciples say: "We have left everything and followed you." Jesus says: "Only if you make community and relationships work will you enter the kingdom. You must leave not just wealth addiction and success addiction but narrow family addiction and find relationships with everyone." In Jesus' time, family was often a closed system and nepotism was rampant. You rewarded your relatives so that your family always looked good and you expected loyalty from them even if you were doing things that were immoral. Jesus says that there is a better life, a free-er life than the suffocation of closed family systems. Family is acceptable as well as wealth but the kingdom matters more. The truth of a family must be tested by the higher truth of the Gospel.

Jesus is talking here about redemption. Redemption means to be rescued. He is talking about redeeming us, rescuing us, from the slavery of wealth addictions and the confinement of closed family systems. He tells us that we must be careful to keep wealth and family in

**their proper place. The truly free person is the one who lets the money go and the family if they try to control and own that person.**

**Redemption is allowing your heart to make your life beautiful, a work of art and to make the world beautiful, better for everyone. If what you are doing is not better for everyone, then you are on the wrong path. Don't walk away from this call, the way the petitioner did in this Gospel passage. Don't settle, half-heartedly, for a lesser life. Don't make the world a lesser place for all of us. Come into the kingdom with all your dreams and values intact. Come into an authentic, not a manipulative life. This is redemption and the hundredfold reward that the Gospel promises. If you live such a life, you will be free and happy. No one will own you. And everyone will be your community and your family.**