

28B SML 2018
MK 10:17-30

Our Blessed Lord had no more begun His journey to Jerusalem than a man ran up to him, stopped him, and knelt before Him in the dirt, “Good teacher . . . what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Both his pace and his posture testified to the desperation in his request. He knew Our Blessed Lord had something he lacked that would bring him full circle, and the rich young man wanted to find out His secret before He left town.

The question certainly sounds genuine enough, even humble. Jesus answered by referring him to the commandments. The rich man’s answer tells us a lot about him. “Teacher, all of these I have observed since my youth.”

Really? Of course we know now, and Jesus knew at the time that this answer wasn’t possible. St. Paul told us that no one has ever kept all of God’s Law (GAL 3:11) and that if even one person could have earned eternal life by the Law, then Christ would have died in vain. If this man had been genuine, he would have known that. God had given the law so that man would come to the end of himself and know he needed Someone to bring him full circle.

Though he had not kept the law, what was most critical in this exchange was that he genuinely thought he had. So for him to think he had kept the Law, he had to re-create the law in his own image. In other words, he would have had to create loopholes in his mind to justify those portions he had not kept, perhaps focusing only on the major parts of the Law such as murder and adultery, and making excuses for his hate, his lust and his selfishness.

By his own desperation we know he missed the point. The fact that he was still seeking eternal life made it clear that he hadn't found it yet, nor was he confident that his current course would produce it. He wanted something more to do.

This man was steeped in his own works. That was evident by the question he asked at the outset. The "I" and the "do" gave him away. "What must I do?" He was focused on himself, his ability, his resources, and how that stacked up against the tall list of 613 laws found in the TORAH, trying hard to earn what Jesus wanted to give him.

How Jesus wanted him to understand that! Mark specifically mentions that Jesus looked at him and loved him. He looked at him and loved him. What did Jesus see?

- ✓ Did he see a little boy trying to be perfect as the only way to win his father's affection?
- ✓ Did he see the years of fruitless labor this man had endured?
- ✓ Did he see the twisted motives he used to justify himself and maintain his illusion of righteousness?
- ✓ Did he see the gnawing in the young man's stomach, born of his obsession with perfection that was destroying him from within?

I'm sure Jesus saw all of that and more. And he wanted the young man to see it too. In order to drive it home, Jesus said, "Go, sell all you have and come back." And the man's face fell, and he went away sad. Who here could do that? I don't know of one person who has ever followed Christ who could do that.

Coaches don't train high jumpers by putting the bar at world-record height and challenging them to jump it. They put it at a height their players can successfully achieve, and then, over the course of time, slowly raise the bar.

Jesus did not do that. Jesus' "sell all you have" put the bar 40 feet in the air and said, "Jump that!" And the rich young man did what any athlete would do; he went away discouraged, knowing he couldn't do it.

The man understood the lesson but missed the point. Jesus wasn't being mean spirited. Jesus raised the bar beyond his ability not because Jesus wanted him to stop trying. The gift Jesus offered the man was to be free of the incredible burden of having to earn God's love on his own. He was so caught up in what he could do, going back to "What can I do?" rather than doing his best and letting Jesus do the rest.

Jesus knows how difficult it is for those who think like the rich young man. By "rich" and "young," the man thought he was "rich" in his own resources:

- ✓ those who feel they can earn it,
- ✓ or pay for it,
- ✓ too focused on their own efforts,
- ✓ their own strength

to receive the simple beauty of God's gift of "the rest." You do your best. I'll do the rest.

The young man's dependence on his own resources was robbing him of the life he sought. No matter how hard he tried, he would never cover the empty place in his heart that sought God's approval, the part where Jesus will do the rest.

So some might ask? Then what's the point? If God loves us regardless, if we are "in" regardless, then why try? Why not live the life of Reilly if, at the "end," we're in.

The rich young man, having money and youth on his side, could have lived the life of Reilly, but he was smart enough to know that wouldn't work for him. Rote following of the law didn't work for him either. Jesus himself said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." The rich young man thought he had the commandment parts down, but it was the "if you love me" that he didn't have, that Jesus would do the rest, that Jesus would bring him full circle.

I knew I would never be a perfect student, scoring perfect on every test. So why try? Because scoring a good grade is better than scoring a bad grade.

I knew I would never be the fastest runner in gym class, finishing first in every race. So why try? Because it's better to finish the race sooner than later.

I know I'll never keep all the commandments all the time. So why try? Because I love Jesus, I'll try my best and let Jesus do the rest.

The Gospel at hand closes with Peter speaking on behalf of the disciples who did leave everything and followed Our

Blessed Lord. And Jesus reminded Peter that none of them had left anything that Jesus wouldn't replace with far more and far better, 100 times more, 100 times better. Why? Because they had left their stuff not because they understood they were earning eternal life, but because of a relationship with Jesus whom they loved, which brought them full circle.

Sadly, we don't get to see the end for the rich young man. My hope is that Jesus' words finally got inside his heart. Whether they did or they didn't, Jesus still offered him an incredible gift, the secret of God's favor, something he didn't need to earn, but was his from the start. Loving God brings us full circle every time.