

28th Sunday in Ordinary Time

All of us have a desire for happiness and security. In today's gospel, we see a man who had enough wealth to make his life fully secure, but still was disturbed and unhappy. What was that "one thing" that he lacked? He lacked "peace of mind" because he allowed his possessions to possess him. He could not imagine accepting Jesus' challenge to give his wealth to the poor and make God as his greatest treasure or possession, or love him alone with an undivided heart. As Christian disciples, we are called to take God himself as our greatest treasure on earth and in heaven.

Like the rich man, we claim to be virtuous and religious by saying, "I haven't done any harm to anyone!" But the point is whether we have done any good to anybody, especially by sharing our resources, talents and possessions with those who are deprived. To gain eternal life it is not enough to avoid evil; we have to do good also by sharing our goods with others.

Former times, when many of us were poorer than what we are now, and had fewer conveniences of modern equipment and gadgets, we had more time for God and neighbors; our relationship with both was much better. Now we are becoming strangers to one another in our neighborhood. We have become less inviting, there's less socializing and less talking. If wealth and prosperity have spoiled our good and warm relationships, and has led to the decline of our service-mindedness or involvement in others' welfare and closer communication with them, then Jesus is right in saying that it is as hard for such persons to enter the Kingdom as for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle.

'Selling all that we have' could mean different things to different people. Of course, this teaching of Christ had motivated the early Christians to literally sell their lands and lay the money at the apostles' feet which in turn was distributed to the needy (Acts 4:34-35). Surely, now Jesus does not expect from those who have social and family obligations to literally sell everything. It could mean one or more of the following things: (1) a proper stewardship or management of wealth as per the gospel principles; (2) renunciation of excessive greed and attachment towards wealth; (3) sacrificing unhealthy friendships, bad influences, improper entertainments, rich life-styles; (4) guarding against the danger of allowing our possessions to control us; (5) following Jesus with an undivided heart by making him our

greatest treasure; and (6) sharing not only our material goods, but also our time, talents, energies and wisdom.

Wealth is not bad in itself. Jesus is neither against wealth nor against all the wealthy. He wants us to renounce the security and power that money and wealth provide in order to be free to follow him. For the rich, wealth can become a dangerous snare. They have to deal with many temptations regarding just ways of earning and using wealth which the poor do not have. If we are not careful with our desire for wealth (1) it could make us think of life and value people in terms of money; (2) it may make us think that there are no other valuable things in life that money cannot buy; (3) it could make us arrogant and think everything in worldly terms and make us put our trust entirely on our wealth that could generate a sense of false security in us; (4) it could make us depend on the security that comes from money and forget to depend on God as the source our life and from whom all wealth comes; (5) it could make us trust more in our wealth than in God and regard it as the only source of happiness; (6) it could make us think of everything in terms of price rather than value; and finally (5) it could make us yield to a perpetual temptation to become more rich by depriving/ defrauding/ exploiting the poor, and become heartless towards their plight.

For Jesus wealth becomes a blessing, only when it is shared with others; it becomes an obstacle to eternal life when selfishly used for oneself. Unchecked greed for wealth is the cause of many troubles in families and in the world. We observe in some families that brothers and sisters are not talking for years due to property disputes. Many children grow up with greediness sown into them by their own parents. Since parents failed to implant the virtue of sharing, it is doubtful whether such children will share their earnings with their old/ sick parents when they require higher treatment. Those of us who are quite happy with faithfully observing all the commandments of God, Jesus looks at with love, just as he looked at the rich man in today's text, and says, "You lack one thing". The rich man found it too hard to share his wealth so he walked away. Jesus asks us: "Will you also go away?"