

Readings for October 14, 2018 -- 28th Sunday in Ordinary Time

All Things are Possible For God

We are reminded that salvation is not a human achievement, but an act of God. The question is, how do we respond to the "countless riches," and to the very gift of salvation that God continually offers us? Jesus looks at us with love, then asks us to let go, and follow him.

Opening prayer: (See back pages)

Opening thoughts: Take a few minutes to think: "Where did you experience God recently, or over the last few weeks?"

Please share your thoughts if you are willing to do so.

Reading 1 WIS 7:7-11

I prayed, and prudence was given me;
I pleaded, and the spirit of wisdom came to me.
I preferred her to scepter and throne,
and deemed riches nothing in comparison with her,
nor did I liken any priceless gem to her;
because all gold, in view of her, is a little sand,
and before her, silver is to be accounted mire.
Beyond health and comeliness I loved her,
and I chose to have her rather than the light,
because the splendor of her never yields to sleep.
Yet all good things together came to me in her company,
and countless riches at her hands.

Responsorial Psalm PS 90:12-13, 14-15, 16-17

R. (14) **Fill us with your love, O Lord, and we will sing for joy!**
Teach us to number our days aright,
that we may gain wisdom of heart.
Return, O LORD! How long?
Have pity on your servants!
R. **Fill us with your love, O Lord, and we will sing for joy!**

Fill us at daybreak with your kindness,
that we may shout for joy and gladness all our days.
Make us glad, for the days when you afflicted us,
for the years when we saw evil.

R. Fill us with your love, O Lord, and we will sing for joy!

Let your work be seen by your servants
and your glory by their children;
and may the gracious care of the LORD our God be ours;
prosper the work of our hands for us!
Prosper the work of our hands!

R. Fill us with your love, O Lord, and we will sing for joy!

Reading 2 HEB 4:12-13

Brothers and sisters:

Indeed the word of God is living and effective,
sharper than any two-edged sword,
penetrating even between soul and spirit, joints and marrow,
and able to discern reflections and thoughts of the heart.
No creature is concealed from him,
but everything is naked and exposed to the eyes of him
to whom we must render an account.

Gospel MK 10:17-30

As Jesus was setting out on a journey, a man ran up,
knelt down before him, and asked him,
"Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"
Jesus answered him, "Why do you call me good?
No one is good but God alone.
You know the commandments: *You shall not kill;*
you shall not commit adultery;
you shall not steal;
you shall not bear false witness;
you shall not defraud;
honor your father and your mother."
He replied and said to him,
"Teacher, all of these I have observed from my youth."
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.
Jesus looked around and said to his disciples,
"How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!"
The disciples were amazed at his words.
So Jesus again said to them in reply,

"Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God!
It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle
than for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."
They were exceedingly astonished and said among themselves,
"Then who can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said,
"For human beings it is impossible, but not for God.
All things are possible for God."
Peter began to say to him, "We have given up everything and followed you."
Jesus said, "Amen, I say to you,
there is no one who has given up house or brothers or sisters
or mother or father or children or lands for my sake and for the sake of the gospel
who will not receive a hundred times more now in this present age:
houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands,
with persecutions, and eternal life in the age to come."

Related Reflections:

Leaving things behind

I spent a summer traveling through India with three shirts, three pairs of underwear, two pairs of pants, and an undersized pair of sandals. I washed clothes often and I never made choices about what to wear. I wasn't uncomfortable. The simplicity was freeing. I left nearly everything back home.

I journeyed on with other things though, and still do. Some of them, more than material possessions, still feel impossible to leave behind. Resentment toward people who have hurt me. Guilt for people I've hurt. Attachments to technology and a lack of moderation. A deeper concern for how I look than how I feel.

These are roadblocks to a lasting relationship with Jesus. More than extra t-shirts or undersized sandals, these are the things I must give up. The sacrifice will pave the way for deeper holiness and strength, and will lead me to eternal life.

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Jesus' image about a camel going through the eye of a needle is so startling and challenging that scribes and commentators have tried to tone down its language. However, we have to accept that Jesus' metaphor presents an image of something quite impossible.

The astonishment of the disciples shows that the saying was indeed a shock. Part of the shock derived from the presumption that being rich was not a hindrance but rather an advantage. For wealthy people could build synagogues, help the needy, sponsor Temple sacrifices. If they could not be saved, who could? And that question opens the way for Jesus' ultimate point: salvation is ultimately not a human achievement but an act of God. And the problem with wealth is that wealth brings power and, often, the delusion that one has no need for others, even for God. If one is rich enough, one can begin to think of oneself as the center of the world.

The fact that the wealthy inquirer of this reading was a keeper of the commandments, including Deuteronomy's prohibition of fraud, was not enough. His property ran his life, and he was not free enough to follow Jesus' way of losing self to find oneself.

When Jesus muses, "How hard it is to enter the kingdom of God," he addresses the disciples as "children," which pointedly echoes [last week's Gospel reading]. The disciples were trying to shoo away some children. Jesus became indignant and said to them, "Let the children come to me; do not prevent them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Amen, I say to you, whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it."

These episodes go together. Indeed, five of Jesus' fourteen kingdom-of-God sayings in Mark occur here in these two accounts. The one about accepting like children helps us see that you do not earn an inheritance (the rich man asks, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?"). You receive an inheritance. You get to enter the kingdom of God (in the future) only if you receive it like a child (in the present). Apparently this man's riches had rendered him incapable of receiving the kingdom like a child.

Dennis Hamm, S.J. -- from the Saint Louis University website

He was shocked and went away grieving

The good man in today's Gospel approaches Jesus seeking unity with God, and Jesus offers him exactly what he is seeking when he tells him, come follow me. But Jesus asked him to give up the one thing he could not give up, the one thing that he thought showed he was special. The one thing that defined him as a person stood between him and what he was seeking. He valued that one thing more than unity with God.

We all have this one thing that we would find difficult to give up if God asked us. This one thing that we think makes us special and defines us. This one thing that tells us and the world who we are. What we have trouble understanding is that the one thing that makes us special, that defines us, the one thing that tells us and the world who we are, is the fact that we are a child of God, loved by the Almighty.

If we understood this, we would understand that we are truly lovable and it would free us from the need for other things to give us value. We would be free to become the person God calls us to be.

What is my one thing? If Jesus asked me to give it up, could I?

—Chris LaMothe teaches theology at Jesuit High School, New Orleans. (First appeared on May 28, 2018 on jesuitprayer.org)

Discussion Questions:

Do I tend to think of my salvation as something I earn?

How does realizing the great gift Jesus has already given me affect or change my relationship with him?

In the second reading, we are reminded how intimately God knows and loves each of us, “penetrating even between soul and spirit, joints and marrow”. How does realizing this love call me to better love him in return?

What are the ramifications in the short term for choosing a life with Christ? Are there people, or situations available to provide support, and to help keep you accountable in your life of faith?

Take a few minutes to answer the question above that Chris LaMothe proposes (*What is my one thing?*) Share with the group if you are willing. Throughout the coming week, make an effort to work on letting go of something that’s an obstacle to following Christ more closely.

Closing Prayer:

Dear God,

I let go of my need to be perfect, and I let You fill me with Your perfect love.

I let go of my ideas of fulfillment, and I let You fill me with what I truly desire.

I let go of what I think of myself, and I let You define my worth.

I let go of what others think of me, and I let You tell me who I am to You.

I let go of my appearance, and I let You shine through me.

I let go of my unreasonable standards, and I let You work through me.

I let go of my will for my life, and I let You reveal Your plan for me.

I let go of all of my past sins, and I let You forgive me.

I let go of my reliance on myself, and I let You be my Redeemer.

I let go of how I view others, and I let You love them through me. —Kate Prain
(jesuitprayer.org)

Suggested music:

Nothing I Hold on to (United Pursuit) OR I Shall Not Want (Audrey Assad)