

28th. Sunday in Ordinary Time

One of the advertisements that I find annoying at the moment is the one with the little man playing his kettle drum. He drums up so much expectation that you would think that the people who have won any kind of a prize had just found a treasure

If we were hoping to find a treasure, where would we look? Would it be in a fast-food shop? Would we dive to find it in a sunken ship? Or would we be looking for a completely different kind of treasure? Would we be looking for the kind of treasure spoken of in today's reading from the Book of Wisdom? "I prayed, and understanding was given to me; I entreated, and the Spirit of Wisdom came to me. I esteemed her more than scepters and thrones; compared to her I held riches as nothing."

Do we think of ourselves as being more like the treasure hunter that we met in today's gospel? He was a very good man who wanted to follow Jesus but could not run to him, because he thought that he had found his treasure already. He asked Jesus what he had to do to inherit eternal life. Jesus assured him that he already knew what God was asking of him by way of the commandments. He could honestly reply, "Master I have kept all these since my earliest days." But the man wanted to do more. And in his love for him Jesus told him what the next step

should be if he was to take up the invitation to become one of his company. For this man it meant that he had to give away everything he owned so that he would be free enough to take the road and become one of his disciples.

In some ways Jesus was just giving him some practical advice. He could not become a member of Jesus band who were wandering around the country preaching the Word and healing people unless he travelled very lightly. But in other ways Jesus was calling this man and all of us to learn how to depend, not upon the possession that we have, but upon the God who provides them for us. We are told that this man's face fell when he heard those words of Jesus and that he went away sad, for he was a man of great wealth.

Possessions can weigh us down. This seemed to be so foreign to the general understanding of faithful Jewish people. Wealth was seen to be a sign of God's favour. Being rich was a blessing from God. But Jesus cuts across that understanding. When Jesus tells his disciples that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God, the disciples ask him if anyone could be saved. "For humans it is impossible, but not for God; because everything is possible for God." Jesus makes that very strong point that the work of salvation is God's work,

not ours. We can only receive the gift that God is giving to us. We cannot create the gift for ourselves.

On Friday I celebrated the Funeral of my Aunt Audrey, the wife of my mother's only surviving brother. My uncle and aunt were well off, but possessions never seemed to be very important to them. They were generous in the way that they shared what they had. I think Jesus is calling all of us to be like that. We express our gratitude for what we have been given by the way that we are ready to share it with others.

Today's reading from the letter to the Hebrews talks about the Word of God as being alive and active, cutting like a two-edged sword. "It can judge the secret emotions and thoughts. No created thing can hide from him; everything is uncovered and open to the eyes of the one to whom we must give account of ourselves." Those words can be comforting, or they can be frightening until we remember who that Word of God is. That Word can only be a Word of love. Yes, it will pierce the innermost part of our soul. But it will make its way there so that we can know deep within us how much we are loved. God's Word is a gift to us to shed light upon the truth of who we are. It will often challenge us and call us back from where we have tried to find satisfaction and fulfillment. But so often the Word of God is spoken to us to give us hope and encouragement.

That is how Jesus ends the gospel today. Having called us to complete dependence upon him Jesus then assures us that God will repay many times over whatever we give up to become the disciples of Jesus. We will be generously repaid in this life and in the life to come. We are not all called to that radical poverty that Jesus' first disciples were living. But we are all called to live as if everything we have is gift. If we live with this attitude of mind and faith, I suspect that we will not need a little man to play a drum for us to discover that our whole world is full of treasures waiting to be found, treasures that will reveal something of who God is for us.