

[Wisdom 7:7-11; Psalm 90; Hebrews 4:12-13; Mark 10:17-27]

There are three perspectives about today's Gospel verse that says, "It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God." The first is that the "Eye of the Needle" for wandering Bedouin tribes in the desert was that narrow ridge where the base of two mountains or two hills come together. It is treacherous for a camel to walk through that very narrow, twisting area, like trying to pass through the eye of the needle, which is exactly what that area is called.

The second meaning comes from the ancient walled City of Jerusalem. The Old Town of current Jerusalem. There were four walls surrounding the city, and each wall had doors and gates of various heights and widths. The smallest and the narrowest was the Needle Gate. The camel literally had to scrape on its knees to enter, if that was the only gate available at the moment.

The third reminded me of the Chapel of the Nativity in Bethlehem. The exact spot where we believe Jesus was born is in a small chapel connected to a very elaborate basilica. In order to enter the Chapel of the Nativity, you have to enter a very modest door, about only four feet high. You have to humble yourself as the Eternal Word was humbled when He took on flesh and dwelt among us. You have to enter that sacred space on your hands and knees.

I'm also reminded of that bulletin announcement that said, "Overeaters Anonymous meets every Tuesday evening at 7 PM in the parish center. Please use the wide double doors on the side of the building."

Wide creatures require wide doors! So here's the problem: You and I have become wide-load creatures if we possess a lot of stuff, or even when our egos swell to the size of our imagined self-importance. When the whole of our attention is captured by the self – our feelings, our worries, our projects, our desire for attention to be paid -- we're not going to be able to force that swollen self-absorption through the door of humility. And that tiny door, Jesus tells us, is the entrance to his Kingdom.

Such a door is entered best on one's knees. Much like the door going into the Chapel of the Nativity in Nazareth. This is why the small and the poor, the rejected, despised, and forgotten ones, will find it easier to crawl through that opening than the rest of us. If we're looking for wisdom, this door is wide enough and low enough to admit everyone in the world. On their knees!

If you're not poor yourself, then make it your business to befriend those who are. Use your "bigness" in the service of those who are small. If you have wealth, you can follow reports every day of places where there is great need. If you have influence, you know without much research who the powerless are. If you're skilled or knowledgeable, teach the ignorant. If you have time, lend it by volunteering. If you have love to give, seek out the lonely. If you have passion, embrace a cause. If you're a prayer warrior, pray your way through the headlines regularly. If you're a great talker, resolve to listen.

Because the alternative is the fallen face and the sad deflation of the man who sought wisdom from Jesus and couldn't bear to accept it. Our consumer society encourages us to overeat, over-party, and over-pamper ourselves, stocking our lives with more goods than our closets and our dwellings can reasonably hold. Our hoarder culture makes us swell to a size too great to fit through the narrow gate to the only true happiness.

A couple of my friends admit that when they are depressed, they "go shopping." But there are two things wrong with this solution. Eventually, the problem returns... along with the new monthly credit card bill!

We risk losing our spiritual connection with God and with the Church. Look at how much "stuff" fills our homes and our lives, things that we never really needed. Today's readings say, "Let Wisdom be your guide. Let God's Word be your guide. Let Jesus Christ be your guide." Our young people who go on mission trips say, "Everyone should have this experience. It teaches you what you can live without, and what you really need to have joy and lasting peace."

Other parishioners, those who have lost their jobs, who have run out of their unemployment benefits or who had to downsize their living arrangements have shared the same observation with me. "You learn real fast what you can

live without... all the 'stuff' that I thought I could never live without. Now I can. Because now I have to." Lessons learned the hard way.

Riches are nothing compared to Wisdom. It is not money that is the root of all evil. It is the LOVE of money that is the root of all evil. The Word of God is a two-edged sword cutting us from those things, those people and those situations that keep us from knowing and loving and serving God completely. If you haven't been cut by a sword, think of that knife on the kitchen table or on the cutting board. Most of us have nicked ourselves once or twice. As painful as that boo-boo on our finger is, imagine the sword of God's Word slicing and dicing our selfishness, our pride, our greed.

How have you experienced God's word as "living and effective"? How has it helped you to figure out what God wants you to do with your life?

Have you ever thought it "hard" to enter the Kingdom of God? In what ways? What have been the obstacles you've faced?

All things are possible for God. Where has God done something "impossible" in your life?

What have you given up for sake of Christ and the Gospel? What is the "price" you've paid for wisdom? Have you been repaid many times over? How?

Whether you are among the wealthiest members of this parish or among the poorest, whether you still have a job or are just hanging on by the skin of your teeth, whether you have a spouse or are a single parent, today's readings are meant for each of us. Prioritize. Give to God generously. Make a leap of faith. God can never be outdone in generosity. Let us see the wisdom in that. AMEN!