

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

The great English writer and convert to Catholicism, Gilbert K. Chesterton, once wrote: “Christianity has not been tried and found wanting or lacking; it has been found difficult and not tried.” We can certainly agree to this, if Chesterton meant that worldwide Christianity has not been tried as a basis on which to motivate our personal lives, to set national policies, or to shape international relationships. Today’s readings say, “Let Wisdom be your guide. Let God’s Word be your guide. Let Jesus Christ be your guide.”

Remember the economic crash ten years ago in 2008? People who had lost their jobs, who had run out of their unemployment benefits or who had to downsize their living arrangements shared with me at that time these words of wisdom: “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. This is the dilemma facing the rich young man. He lived a virtuous life. He kept all the commandments. He followed all the rules and regulations of his faith, his religion. But Jesus looks at him, with great love in His eyes and in His heart, and tells him the one thing – the one last thing – he needs to do to find lasting peace and complete joy.

For those who are unsure, the Catholic position in a nutshell is this: Poverty is not a virtue, nor is wealth inherently sinful. Success can obviously be measured in a lot of ways, but if it happens to include a nice fat paycheck, that’s OK, too, as long as it is earned ethically. The real measure of our wealth, of course, is the treasure we’ve stored up in heaven, which makes whatever we have or don’t have here ironically immaterial. The best kind of riches to bank on, according to Scripture, is wisdom of the ways of God. If we’ve got that, our relative worth in dollars and cents won’t impede our spiritual progress.

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.

The bottom line is: It's not *what* we have, it's *how* we have it that matters in the doorway of the Kingdom. Can we let our wealth go when it is required of us -- and by wealth, I mean our stuff, our advantage, the esteem others have for us, our relationships, our health, and even our lives? Is there anything we've got in our fists that's clutching us back so tightly that we are afraid to let it go? Following Jesus is a lifestyle that is only available to people who are truly free. If there's a prior claim on our hearts, we've still got some divesting to do.

Whether you are among the wealthier 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 one of you. What are you doing with who you are, what you are, and what you have to give thanks and praise to God? That's what it boils down to: the "S" – Word – Stewardship. Stewardship is what I do with what I have when I believe totally in God. It is taking what blessings we have and using if for God's work, not ours. Most of us generously give God 60% or 70% or even 80% or 90% of who we are, what we are, and what we have. Even if we give 99%, God still wants that 1%. God wants all aspects of our lives dedicated to God.

My friends, I think Jesus is asking for all of who you are, all of what you are and all of what you have. What will be YOUR response? Will your face fall? Will you leave here sad? Or are you ready to take the plunge? God wants to be in every single aspect of our lives. Nothing should be closed off or held tight.

One of my favorite prayers is this one from St. Ignatius Loyola. It goes like this: "Take Lord, receive all my liberty. My memory, understanding, my entire will. Take Lord, receive, all I have and possess. You have given all to me; now I return it. Take, Lord, receive, all is Yours now. Dispose of it, wholly according to Your Will. Give me only Your love and Your grace. That's enough for me." "YES, Lord, all is Yours now. Give me only Your Love and Your Grace." AMEN!