

St Pius & St Anthony 28th Sunday Ordinary Time Year B2

As a little exercise, we can ask ourselves “What is the one thing, you think, you can’t live without?” Hopefully, we all say ‘God’. But sometimes other things creep in to suggest to us that we can’t live without them. Like our stuff-possessions, material things.

The young man in the gospel is learning his one thing, and after Jesus tells him to go sell everything he has-give to poor- he learns he still has a lot of work to do, getting down to spiritual business, and letting stuff go. Why? He must really like his stuff. Mark 10:22 tells us “he went away sad....” And apparently he had a lot of stuff, Mark 10:22 goes on to say, “for he had many possessions.” This story with Jesus reminds me of the old comedian George Carlin and his rant about ‘stuff’ (about how my stuff is stuff, but other people’s stuff is ‘junk’, that a house is only a place we put our stuff, and when it is full, we go rent other places to store our stuff.....) Apparently, this young man has so much stuff, that he can’t see through it, and unless he can let go of it, heaven seems out of view for him. So, for now, he walks away from Jesus. Yet, we do want to give him credit for even coming to Jesus. He is seeking a better way, he asks Jesus, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” He is willing to seek. He is on the right track, but he still has a lot of work to do. I think that is why the reading has Jesus take three steps with him. Mark 10:21 says Jesus 1) “**looking** at him, 2) **loved** him and 3) **said** to him”. It is as if Jesus is telling him, I know this may sound hard, but you can do it! However, Jesus’ invitation to eternity is goes over like a lead balloon, because the man is weighted down with a lot of earthly treasure to divest and detach from. This reading encourages us to ask ourselves, how we are doing with handling our stuff. Might our stuff lead us away from God at times? It happens that we can get possessed by our stuff rather than we possess it? For all its clutter, it can lead us to not see heaven ahead. Even though we know it is not going with us – there is an African proverb that the ‘death shroud has no pockets’, or the way we hear it in America, “you never see a U-Haul following a hearse” (Job 1:21 has him saying, “Naked I entered the world, and naked I will leave.”) Possessions are not going with us. Or more starkly, Jesus teaches today that our stuff can block our entrance, us clinging to will cause us to be stuck at the gate. Very **little**, gets through the heavenly portal (This shouldn’t surprise us because Jesus had just said about five verses ago in Mark 10:15, “to enter kingdom of heaven, you must become as a child” and over in Matthew 7:13-14 we read a parallel version of this passage, where Jesu says, “*Enter through the narrow gate; the gate is widethat leads to destruction, But How narrow the gate.....that leads to life.*”

This is behind his whole 'eye of the needle' image. Not much gets through the passage to eternity. Only the necessary, the thread. So, eternal life is all about the opening - the passage. We have to get into the opening, and I mean that like we have to get into the 'emptying ourselves'. Letting go what accumulates, or what we gather and cling to - our stuff and possessions. Us and Stuff doesn't fit through, but us open and seeking God - much, more likely fit.

Thinking of what gets through openings, I know I learned a little about that when I was in college. I had a finch - a little bird. I found his singing beautiful and peaceful, good to study by. But I thought one day, "I wonder how he'd appreciate at least feeling the outside wind blow through in his wings (Yes, still in a cage, but maybe an outside big cage.) So, I went to building a box cage for him. I framed it up in our basement workshop, out of some old wood spindles we had removed from porch deck railing, and I strung it enclosed with chicken wire. Well, my first issue with openings, was when I went to the door of basement getting out and discovered the cage square was wider than door frame. So, I had to take it apart, reassembled it in the garage, (thank goodness inside there) because as soon as I put him in it, he flew right through the chicken wire holes! He just looked bigger I thought, fluffier than the width of wire holes, and how was I supposed to test it, unless I tried test-cramming him through the hole (like the old Fisher-Price kid toy sticking the star shape through the star hole!) which would be cruelty, as I might tear a wing off him! But what gets through?

This is where Jesus mentions the 'eye of the needle'. What passes through? Us maybe, but the stuff stays at the door. Facing the eye of the needle focuses us. What is most important, what is essential, only the eternal, goes through,- no stuff, only soul. The man's question was 'What must I do to inherit eternal life?' Jesus seems to say, "Eternal, that is lasting. That is more than, beyond anything here, yet. Everything here, comes apart, breaks down, decays or corrupts. So to prepare, we have to let go all of this, opening, emptying ourselves of all this. We must simplify life of its clutter and commotion. In order to receive (inherit) anything in your hand, the hand must be open. So we have to let go of whatever we are clinging to now, to receive what God intends to hand to us. Like having the experience of being at a big reception and someone offers you a ramekin and says, "You have to try this creme brulee." But with a salad plate in one hand and entrée in the other, there's no room. Not this time. It doesn't fit.

So Jesus tells the young man to go sell what he has, give to the poor, and then come follow him. The letting go and uncluttering of himself from stuff, will also bond him with other people by the act of generous sharing. That begins the

accumulation of eternal matter – the bonding of relationships. That is what goes on or gets us through. By divesting himself from his stuff, he is vesting himself with eternal treasure, in-vesting in bonds of infinite relationship (God & Others).

I notice that the commands Jesus questioned him about, are all the ones about human relationships. Sometimes people call them the second tablet commands. As we can break them down into two parts, dividing them into the first three about 'love of God' commands and then the rest, seven about 'love of neighbor' commands'. So here, Jesus didn't mention the first three (1-Honor One God, 2-Keep sacred His name and 3- Keep Holy His Day), but he did list the other seven. They are all ones about how we relate to others. Our opening to eternity is through what we give, how we serve other people. Jesus was directing the man to get out of himself. Let go his preoccupation with himself and focus on giving to others (*I notice he said, "What I must do to get eternity" and later "I have done those since youth." I, I, kinda like 'me-me')* By Jesus focusing him on other people Jesus is telling him and us, "Let go of you, and discover God-Eternity, in acts of generous sharing with others, seeing God in them" when we meet the need of others it reinforces an interdependence or bond God created between us all. That is eternal treasure, the only thing getting us out of this world. Our recognition of Christ in one another, and giving our all to get through and return to God, all that came from Him. As the prayer of St Francis, teaches us, 'It is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.'