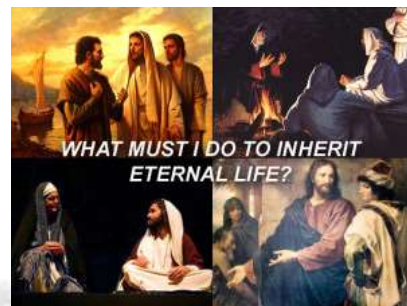


(Food for thought)

Gospel: Mark 10: 17-30

An Open-Agenda



There is a basic difference between taking an initiative and responding to a call. Today's Gospel is the beginning of two extraordinary, contrasting, and very familiar stories. *The first* may be understood as an ultimately failed initiative, and the second as a successful response to a call. The first, of course, is the story we know as "The rich (young) man," and *the second* is the story of blind Bartimaeus. The rich man asks Jesus what he must do "to inherit eternal life." We know very little about him - neither his name nor his age. We simply see that he is more reflective than impulsive, and in search of something more than just a "quick fix." His agenda is clear, his approach direct, and his intentions are honorable. Jesus' answer is this: *there is no single thing that one must do, or can do, to inherit eternal life. No single act will do, for that would be too mechanical, too much like magic.* Eternal life is a gift, freely offered to all, yet quite beyond price. We cannot purchase what is priceless, yet if it is freely offered we may accept it wholeheartedly. And if we truly want something that is priceless, we will be prepared to pay any price, prepared to give everything we have. Nothing less than a wholehearted commitment is a legitimate response to God's gift of life. As a result, the man, loved by Jesus, departs, sorrowfully.

Each of us shall have to take this gospel to heart. We need to examine our perspectives and strip away our illusions. What is really important for life, we cannot earn or grasp by ourselves. It's not that we aren't good people, respectable and friendly. It's just that God has even more to offer us; so much more that we can let go of other priorities in our lives so that we can receive the gift waiting for us.

Discipleship requires new kinds of relationships, new kinds of community. Rugged individualism is simply not adequate. What God wants to give cannot be purchased or earned. Like the rich man, we need to ask ourselves: "Right now, at his stage of our lives, what must we do to be more responsive to the invitation Jesus is extending to us?" And rather than presupposing we know the answer to that question, we might pray for a listening heart to the One who is saying, "Come follow me."

