

28th Sunday, B Cycle, October 11 2015

1st Reading: Wisdom 7: 7-11 - *I would let go of riches to receive wisdom.*

Responsorial Psalm 90 "Fill us with your love, O Lord, and we will sing for joy."

2nd Reading: Hebrews 4:12-13 - *The Word of God is living and effective, sharper than a two-edged sword.*

Gospel: Mark 10:17-30 - *Sell what you have & give to the poor.*

♪♪ Let us build a house where love can dwell & all can safely live

A place where saints & children tell how hearts learn to forgive;

Built of hopes & dreams & visions, rock of faith & vault of grace;

Here the love of Christ shall end divisions:

ALL ARE WELCOME, *ALL ARE WELCOME*, ALL ARE WELCOME, *IN THIS PLACE!* ♪♪

Peter

The gospel today is about a young person who wants to be welcomed into the Kingdom of God.

Anna

He runs up to Jesus & asks him what he can do to inherit eternal life –
some day.

Lovingly Jesus reminds him of things that he already knows, by quoting
the commandments that refer to how we should treat each other.

Jesus is welcoming someone who is seeking deeper meaning,
& reminding us that we are called to welcome each other.

Jesus even expands on the 10 commandments, by saying

"you shall not defraud."

He knew that often the rich get richer by defrauding the poor.

Then Jesus changes the game – he tells him & us—how to receive eternal
life right here & now.

He tells us how to build "*a house where love can dwell,*"

as we sang in the song.

You see, Jesus offers us eternal life not just *after* we die, but *right now*.

The life he gives as a gift begins **now**, not only

when we breathe out our last breath on earth

& breathe in our 1st breath in heaven.

He is talking about living the words of a prayer that we say so often,

"thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

You know what that prayer is!

And then he tells us *how* we can build God's kingdom on earth. He says to the young man: "Let go of what you have and give to the poor, and come, follow me." Those are words that St Francis followed literally when he heard them. That is an essential part of the preaching and life of Pope Francis.

But the man in the Gospel story is not ready to let go of his wealth, so he went away sad. Then Jesus says some strange words: *It's easier for a camel to get through the eye of a needle than for someone with suitcases full of expensive stuff to get into the kingdom of God.* [can you picture that?]

There have been many ways of understanding that saying over the centuries. Some medieval commentators say the "eye of the needle" was a narrow gate into Jerusalem that was impossible to get a camel through - so you would have to get off first & leave your camel behind.

Others say that the word for camel in Aramaic is very similar to the word for "rope". So what Jesus was saying in Aramaic could have been that it is easier for a rope to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter God's kingdom. Whatever it means, & maybe it was both, what Christ is saying, then & now, is that **it's impossible** for someone who trusts in their wealth to get into the kingdom.

It's like putting your hand in a jar and holding on to a baseball. You can't get your hand out until you let go of what you are holding on to. (That's how monkeys are sometimes trapped in India - a piece of fruit is put in a jar, and the monkey cannot get his hand out of the jar while holding on to the bait.)

That scares the rich man in the story, & it shocks the apostles. You see, they were taught that if you lived the law - starting with the 10 commandments - you would get rich. Wealth was a sign of God's favor.

But Jesus says that being rich makes it harder to get into God's kingdom, because it makes it harder to put God at the center, to trust in God alone.

That should make every one of us take notice, since we live in one of the wealthiest nations in the world, & sometimes neglect or even defraud the poor. Pope Francis reminds us over & over again that those who are in need are part of our family & when we serve their needs we are serving Jesus.

Once his first followers were listening, - And I hope we are too - Jesus tells us what is really good news. These words are among the most powerful in the whole New Testament, "For human beings it is impossible, but not for God. All things are possible for God."

I like the translation, "Nothing is impossible with God."

In other words, it is impossible to be saved through our own human resources [on our own] - with the power that riches give us. And what are our riches? It is not just our money or possessions, it can be who we know or whatever we hold on to [like the ball in the jar].

It could also be old resentments or guilt or it could be the way things were or are. Sr. Anna & I are very familiar with what happens in communities. Sometimes what gets in the way of change or growth is summed up in the 7 what are sometimes called the 7 last words of community life,

"We never did it that way before."

Holding on to wealth gets in the way of finding God, of following the way of Christ. That's clear in today's world as well as at the time of Christ. Nations start wars in order to stay in power & to get richer. We defraud the poor, denying medical coverage to those who most need it because a system that makes money for insurance companies cannot provide for those who cannot pay high premiums. We produce enough food to take care of all the people on earth, but people with money & power take more than they need, while others go hungry & we waste tons of food.

Still, the good news is: **Nothing** is impossible with God, everything is a grace. If we stop holding on to riches, & give to those in need, we will have open hands to receive the grace of God's gift of life, love & presence.

Anna

Fr. Peter had to live the invitation of Jesus to the young man in the Gospel when his house – which also served as our ministry center – was badly damaged by the flooding caused by [Hurricane Irene on August 28, 2011](#).

He lost most of his possessions, but hoped to get back into the doublewide mobile home he had been renting for 16 years after it was repaired & renovated. He lived in temporary residences for 2½ years – he called it “camping” – holding on to the hope that he would be able to move back into a place near the creek, close to his canoe and in a beautiful stand of trees.

Then, in January, 2014, he realized that he was not going to be able to move back in, so he let go of needing to go back. It was less than 24 hours later that I was talking to my landlord, who told me that the tenant below my apartment was moving out and asked, “Do you know anyone who is looking for an apartment?”

We had been looking for a place since 2011, while still holding on to the possibility of returning to Peter's old place, but none were right for anything but a temporary oasis.

In early February, 2014, with the help of some of our web of relationships (15 people and 3 pickup trucks) we moved donated furniture into the new apartment and received the promise of Jesus to Peter & his other apostles, *Anyone who gives up possessions or connections for my sake will receive (along with some persecutions) much more in this present age along with eternal life extending to the age to come.*



Peter & his nephew, Nicolas, before the flood



Peter's house on Aug. 29, 2011

We pray that we **all** can live the words of the hymn we began with:

Let us build a house where prophets speak, & words are strong & true,
Where all God's children dare to seek to dream God's reign anew.
Here the cross shall stand as witness & as symbol of God's grace;
Here as one we claim the faith of Jesus:

ALL ARE WELCOME, ALL ARE WELCOME,
ALL ARE WELCOME IN THIS PLACE !