

Reflection for the 28th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Are you living a life that will enable you to inherit eternal life? Boy that is a question that would seem to desire an introduction and not something that you would bring up when you first meet someone or start a conversation with them. One would think that there should be some pleasantries exchanged before a question like this is asked. This question is clearly not what would be called a “lead off question.” This question is personal and would not seem to be a question that you would ask someone that you do not know very well. Even if you know the person very well this question just might not seem like a question that you would ask.

Today in our Gospel we have a man that runs up to Jesus and asks Him, “*Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?*” No introduction, no explanation, the first words that this man says to Jesus are, good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life. It would be very understandable if Jesus had asked the man a few questions before he answered his question. But Jesus asks no questions He just answers the man’s question by telling him that in order for him to inherit eternal life the man needs to follow the Ten Commandments. The man then informs Jesus that he has followed the Ten Commandments since his youth. At this moment in our Gospel reading, we hear that Jesus looks at the man with love and says to him, “*You are lacking in one thing. Go, sell what you have, and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.*” This is the invitation, the moment that the man was seeking. He knew that there was more for him to do than following the Ten Commandments, he knew God was calling him to something more. Jesus provides him the answer to his quest, now he knew what he needed to do, to reach the next step in his journey of faith. One would think that the man must have been filled with great joy, for now he knew what he needed to do.

We next hear in the Gospel that the man is not filled with great joy, he is not overwhelmed with knowing what his next step was to be in his journey of faith. Rather the man is sad and just leaves. He had many possessions and was not willing or able to part with them. So, he stops his journey of faith, he does not take the next step. The man has gone as far as he is willing to go, we can assume that he does not return to his old way of life, but he also does not take the next step in his faith walk. He is stuck, for he did not have the Spiritual Wisdom so that he could see all of reality with perfect clarity.

St. Francis of Assisi, Religious, founder of the Franciscans and the Poor Clares, born 1181, died 1226. The book *Saint of the Day*, by Fr. Leonard Foley makes this statement about St. Francis, “*Serious illness brought the young Francis to see the emptiness of his frolicking life as leader of Assisi’s youth. Prayer, lengthy and difficult, led him to a self-emptying like that of Christ, climaxed by embracing a leper he met on the road.*” This was St. Francis’ next step in his journey of faith. St. Francis had the Spiritual Wisdom that enabled him to see all of reality with perfect clarity. It is this wisdom that guided St. Francis for the rest of his life.

Each one of us as followers of Christ also have that next step in our journey of faith to take, we like the man in the Gospel reading today are being asked to do something that is life changing and enables us to die to ourselves and to live in Christ. Yes, we might be asked like the man in the Gospel to sell what we have and to give it to the poor, we might be asked to go on a retreat, join a ministry, or become a member of a Lay Order, or something else. Whatever our Lord is asking us today may we all follow the example of St. Francis and embrace the Spiritual Wisdom that will give us perfect clarity in our journey of faith. Spiritual Wisdom is found in our relationship with Christ. It is in our total abandonment to Christ that our hearts are capable of amazing generosity. It is in this act of giving our ourselves, we imitate Christ, and we discover Spiritual Wisdom.