

Twenty-eighth Sunday Per Annum (B)
October 11, 2015.

How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God' (Mk. 10:24).

In a recent visit to one of our schools, I was asked to speak to a class about the Mass and the items related to its celebration. I brought with me a chalice and paten that I would use if I were offering Mass in a hospital; a simple yet beautiful and noble item suitable for sacred worship. I explained to the children that the inside of the chalice and the paten that hold our Lord's Body and Blood are plaited in gold because of our reverence for the Blessed Sacrament. I explained to them that in fact, everything related to our worship is extra-ordinary; that is to say, special, beyond what is usual. The worship of God must be noble and beautiful for we give to Him the very best we have. As often happens, children ask other questions and so one boy, perhaps a future accountant, questioned me about the cost of other items found in a church. Another boy who had been listening to this exchange with some annoyance looked at him and said, *'There's more to life than money, you know'*. Great insight and wisdom from a young boy and a good echo of our Lord's admonition.

How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God'. To understand in a deeper manner what our Lord is teaching us it may be helpful first to consider how one can enter the kingdom of God. In St. Luke's Gospel, our Lord says, *'Blessed are you poor for yours is the kingdom of God'* (6:20). At face value it seems that a state of material poverty guarantees entrance in God's kingdom but this is not the case at all. It looks like our Lord is beatifying or elevating an entire social class yet this also is not the case at all. In the Judaism of Our Lord's time, the term *poor* was practically synonymous with *holy* and *pious* or *godly*. In the Gospel, the poor person is the one who is devoted to God, one who by faith has placed all his trust in God. This form of poverty can characterize both the materially poor and the rich alike. Material poverty is a relative term. By God's grace and through hard work many of us have most if not all of our material needs met. There is no sin in this. The Gospel is not about the redistribution of wealth. In Luke's Gospel we read that Our Lord and His disciple were supported in their ministry through the generosity of women whose names are given: *Mary Magdalene...and Joanna...Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means* (8: 2-3). The same is true today. The Church's mission which carries on the mission of Our Lord is aided and supported through your generosity. Our lack or abundance of material wealth is not what determines our closeness to God; it is rather our devotion to God and our trust in Him. This is the heart of the Gospel. This disposition of trust is solidly based on the foundation of humility and is expressed by our willingness to take up our cross and follow our Lord.

Being conformed to Christ as priest, prophet and king in virtue of our baptism is the single most important thing in our life. In this regard all of are wealthy beyond measure. Because of this our lives have a profound dignity and meaning and we are able no less to give meaning to our suffering; because the only way that suffering can be redeemed and become redemptive is by this sharing in Our Lord's priesthood. This is why the Apostle Paul – a model of Christian discipleship for all of us – said, *I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord (Phil. 3:8)*. Our Lord does not condemn the rich but He does remind us that wealth can potentially be a source of confusion for us. He challenges us to practise detachment from our material wealth and to be generous.

'Look, we have left everything and followed you.' For some, these words of St. Peter are literally true. Vowed priests and religious have been and continue to be a source of inspiration for the Church of what it means to follow our Lord without reservation. One day however, in death, all of us will also have to leave everything to follow Jesus; and please God, we will make our own St. Peter's words: *'Look, we have left everything and followed you.'* A spirit of generosity and detachment prepares us for that day. For most people, this moment in life will be the most difficult; and if we are rich in earthly terms it may indeed be difficult for us to let go of these so as to enter God's kingdom.

Nevertheless, our participation in the Mystery of Christ prepares us for the moment when we will be one with Him in death so that we might enter into the fullness of life. The humanity of Christ our Lord is a guide taking each one of us by the hand. Our Lord has already gone before us in death and He has walked in the shadow of the valley of death. We need not be afraid for He is our Good Shepherd, the way itself and the goal of our journey. Our Lord humbled Himself that we might be saved and become rich in God's grace and so he teaches us that the path of devout humility regardless of our economic status, is the path that we must all walk. He comes to us in the poverty of the Eucharist and He invites us to become one with Him in the mystery of self-giving love which expresses itself in humility and generosity. He who calls us into His kingdom has declared that *whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it (Lk. 18:17)*. This is the heart of the Gospel – true wisdom. If we possess this wisdom, uncounted wealth is also ours. Paradoxically, it is wealth that makes us poor in spirit – fit for God's own kingdom.

As we observe the Thanksgiving holiday, I wish all of you and your families a happy thanksgiving. As you celebrate God's abundant blessings with your families and welcome into your homes your extended families and friends, do not neglect to give thanks also for our family of faith and the privilege that is ours here in our parish church. It is here that our lives are sanctified by the grace of the Sacraments. It here that we are formed by divine teaching; here we learn to submit to the gentle yoke of Christ our Saviour, that we may become truly wise. Here we are nourished with God's own life and we realise that there is definitely more to life than money.