

28th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

St. Mark 10:17-30

Most of us want to be happy and most of us want to be free. We want to be free because freedom brings happiness. Well, not necessarily. If freedom means that I can do whatever I like, whenever I like, then that is not so much freedom as it is choice. Freedom is not about doing whatever I like, whenever I like. It is about doing what the Lord likes. Admittedly there are many times and many situations that I do not want to do what the Lord would like. I don't always want to go out of my way for someone else, I certainly don't always want to forgive, but the Lord has said that happiness lies in sacrifice and forgiveness, and by sacrifice and forgiveness I find freedom.

Consider the young man in the Gospel who went away sad because of the Lord's words. He lost his happiness because he could not hand over his choices to God. There is no doubt that he was a good man—he had kept the commandments his whole life. But he wanted to be perfect. But perfection would cost him his wealth and he probably had a great deal of his sense of self, of who he was and why he mattered, tied up with his wealth. That's not unusual, we may have often felt that we would be more confident or more popular or just happier if we had this or that thing or if we wore those clothes. We all want to be accepted, to have a purpose, to be needed and wanted. It's when these things are lacking that so many people abuse themselves and others. For example, drugs and alcohol can be an escape from the terrors of reality and indiscriminate relationships can make a person feel as though they are loved. Just like wealth these things can become idols that distract us from our true idol which is Christ. Unlike Christ these things don't make demands upon us, but they do cost us our souls and our bodies; the choice made for a moment of happiness is eaten away by guilt and despondency when we realise

nothing has really changed. Christ, on the other hand, does make demands upon us, but those demands give us happiness and freedom.

But we should be honest, the demands of Faith do not necessarily lead to immediate happiness and freedom. In fact there can be a great deal of pain and suffering between now and then. So we look for a distraction or a refuge. This might be eating or shopping or television or the internet and it may even be alcohol or drugs or indiscriminate relationships. Food and money and possessions and entertainment and alcohol and certain relationships are not evil in and of themselves. They are, all of them, gifts of God for the sake of our salvation and the salvation of others. They only become evil when we make an idol of them—when they are no longer stepping-stones on our way to God but instead become stones with which we build our house. This was the fault of the young man for his wealth was no longer a means along the way but had become an end in itself. The choice between poverty in this world for the sake of boundless treasure in the next was too great an ask. Maybe he was frightened of being poor—it can be a very frightening thing for it means a lack of security and even a lack of self-worth. But that was the sacrifice he was asked to make—to sacrifice his wealth and all that it meant to him for the sake of his salvation and the salvation of others.

As human beings we are limited and we can only attach ourselves to so much before we no longer have the capacity to take on anything more. Christ hangs naked on the Cross because He emptied Himself and forsook all attachments so that He could attach Himself forever to you and me.