

# 28<sup>th</sup> 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 we think 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 Our Lord likes. Admittedly there are many times and many situations that we do not want to do what Our Lord would like. We don't always want to go out of our way for someone else, we don't always want to forgive, but Our Lord has said that happiness lies in sacrifice and forgiveness, and through sacrifice and forgiveness we find freedom.

Consider the young man in the Gospel who went away sad because of Our 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. 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 and promiscuous 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 Jesus Christ. Unlike Our Lord 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. Our Lord, 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 promiscuous relationships. Food and money and possessions and entertainment and alcohol and 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. Our Lord hangs naked on the Cross because He emptied Himself and forsook all attachments so that He could attach Himself forever to you and to me.