

28th S. in OT, Yr B. 14-10-18. Love requires more.

There's a sentence in our 2nd reading this evening/morning which reminds us that every weekend as we come together to celebrate the Eucharist, we are being put to the test by the readings assigned to that weekend.

That sentence tells us that **"God's Word is living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword, - it judges the reflections and thoughts of the heart."**

Today's readings are a good case in point. Like the rich man in today's Gospel, there are times when we really want to move ahead with our lives, but cannot quite do so. We are hanging on to a security blanket, and to let go of that, is a frightening prospect.

The rich man's challenge becomes our challenge. Like him, we are continually called to peel away deeper levels of the Gospel message. We too, must put aside whatever stands between us and a total response to God.

Our Gospel reading today presents us with a scene that's rarely seen in society: - a rich man kneels at the feet of a poor man. Commonly it is the poor who bow to the rich, occasionally in respect, but more often in acknowledgment that wealth is power. The poor man we know quite well. His name is Jesus. The rich man is not so well-known. The story leaves him nameless, but it tells us something. When Jesus reminded him of the ethical portion of the commandments, he replied: "Teacher, I have kept all of these since my youth." The man was sincere, and Jesus accepted that at face value. Keeping the commandments is something to be admired!

The Gospel then tell us: "Jesus, looking at him, loved him..." There is tenderness in that statement. But along with that tenderness there is also a challenge: **The demands of love are always greater than the demands of law.** This man was soon to learn that it is one thing to avoid hurting others: the law required that. It is another thing to give one's self sacrificially for the benefit of others: love requires that!

When we look at our social obligations through the eyes of Christ, new meanings begin to appear. They are not so simple as, at first, they may seem. The Law says, **"You shall not murder."** The rich man had kept that command. Murder to him was unthinkable. And so it is to you and me. We can hardly imagine taking the life of another human being, let alone

doing it. That's a good thing. The world would be a better and safer place if everyone felt that way.

But with Jesus, that kind of goodness was **not** good enough. He looked at people through the eyes of love, and that gave the commandments a deeper dimension. To spare the life of another human being is one thing. **To truly value the life of another person is another!** When we see people as Jesus saw them, we don't simply let them live; we will help them live.

The law, of course, doesn't require us to do that, but Jesus did. With him the ordinary kind of goodness was not good enough. He expected more. Think for a moment about another word from the law, - **"Honour your father and mother"**. We focus our thoughts on those who cared for us in childhood. We owe them something for the rest of their lives. Most of us accept that. **That is good, but it is not good enough. Love requires more.**

Remember how earlier in Mark's Gospel Jesus said: "Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother." With him the family attitude went beyond blood ties. We have an old saying: **"Charity begins at home"**, and Jesus would agree with that: - **Home is the proper place for charity to begin, but not the place for it to end.** That spirit of care, of acceptance and honour has no stopping place until it includes the whole human family. The law, of course, doesn't require that – but Jesus did. With him ordinary goodness was not good enough, he expected more.

Must we take the claims of Christ so seriously? Can't we just be decent men and women? Why wouldn't that be good enough?

A writer tells this story in one of his writings, and you may have heard the likes of it before. A young door-to-door salesman was assigned to a rural area. One day he came upon a farmer seated in a rocking chair on his front porch. The young man went up to the farmer enthusiastically and said: "Sir, I have a book here that will tell you how to farm ten times better than you are doing now." The farmer didn't bother to look up; he simply kept on rocking. Finally, after a few minutes, he glanced up at the young man and said: "Young man, I don't need your book. I already know how to farm ten times better than I'm doing now."

This is a good illustration of what Jesus is talking about today. The farmer was capable of farming better, but he lacked the commitment to do so. The rich man was capable of doing more than just keep the commandments, but he lacked the commitment to do so.

The Gospel today makes it painfully clear that there is more to Christianity than just keeping the commandments.

We can be grateful for a Christ who requires more of us than respectability. Whether we ever rise to his challenge or not, we can be glad that he demands something more dynamic than mere decency. With him, ordinary goodness is not good enough. He expects more.

(Adapted from a homily by Fr. Michael T. Hayes, found in Homilies for the Whole Community, wisdom from a Pastor's Heart, Yr B, 23rd Publications.)