

28TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, B
DETACH TO ATTACH

“Go, sell everything you have and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come follow Me.’ But his face fell at these words, and he went away sad, for he was a man of great wealth”

The Desire to Live Forever: Cryogenics is a branch of physics that deals with the production and behaviour of materials at very low temperatures. Cryogenic preservation of humans has to do with the preservation of human bodies with the intention of future revival. In some parts of the world, there are Cryogenics warehouses and organizations like Tomorrow Biostasis (another word for Cryogenics) that encourage people to pay money to have their bodies preserved until the time when scientific technology has been able to solve the problem of life extension and revival is possible, then their bodies can be reanimated to live and enjoy extended life on earth. The desire to live forever is not new. No one wants to die if he can help it. In today’s Gospel (Mk. 10: 17-30), a young man came to Jesus to seek the path to eternal life. Jesus’ answer does not involve cryogenics and biostasis, nor nutritional supplements and exercises. So, what is it about?

Who is Good But God: This is a very dramatic story with both gloomy and bright sides to it. A young man, on seeing Jesus, “ran up, knelt before Him and put this question to Him: ‘Good Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?’” (Mark 17: 17). There are expressive gestures of eagerness, earnestness, homage, and overflowing emotions here, which demonstrate that the young man was convinced Jesus was competent to give to the question burning in his heart, and that he had respect for Jesus as a teacher “with authority.” With Jesus, emotion is not a criterion for discipleship, so he calmed down the young man by asking him: “Why do you call Me good? No one is good but God alone.” Jesus was not in any way denying that He is good, but He was inviting the young man to reflect on what he had just said. He was asking him in other words, “Are you acknowledging Me as God?” Secondly, He was pointing out to him, just as St. Paul teaches: “all have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God” ((Rom. 3: 23). Jesus was leading him from the physical to the spiritual; from the natural to the supernatural. Faith in Christ is not a matter of emotion but conviction. It is not about coated flowery language and accolades but a movement of the heart.

Necessary but Not Enough: Then Jesus rehearsed the Commandments, “the second table of the law” that has to do with our relationship with one another, for him. By doing this, Jesus indicates that following the Law of God is a necessary path to gaining eternal life. It would be a grave error to think that Jesus was playing down on the importance of the Decalogue. The young man’s answer to Jesus was quite striking: “I have kept all these from my earliest days” (Mark 10: 20). Mark tells us that “Jesus looked at him steadily and loved him” (Mark 10: 21). This is the first time in the Gospel where Jesus is said to have looked and loved anyone. This sums up the young man’s intention of genuine search and honesty in living a life of obedience to the Law. But even that was not sufficient to get him what he needed. Keeping the Law is important but there is more to life in Christ and eternal

life. Let us say, obedience to the Commandments is the first step. Jesus Christ, the Eternal Word, penetrating between bones and marrow and discerning the thoughts of the heart, perceives that the young man's heart is not captured by the love of God, but by the love of his wealth, said to him: "There is something you lack" (Mark 10: 21). Now Jesus gives the second step on the journey: "Go, sell everything you have and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come follow Me." This was a difficult and rather strange condition because, for the ancient Jews, wealth and riches were signs of God's blessings on the one who fears the Lord, and poverty was perceived as a curse on the one who is disobedient (Deuteronomy 28:1). So, to ask him to sell everything and give the money to the poor invariably means to render him poor. We must note that wealth, is not bad, but wealth has the power to exert a pull and influence our loyalties. Arguably, the wealthier and comfortable we are, the more independent we become, and the less important God are to us. This can be seen in the lives of the peoples of developed nations, where faith is dwindling and Churches and places of worship are turned into malls and libraries.

Detach to be Attached: The young man was sincere. He was zealous about his faith and desired to enjoy eternal life in the here-after. But only one thing stood in his way – he was attached to his wealth. This explains his reaction to Jesus' response: "he went away sad, for he was a man of great wealth" (Mark 10: 22). He was not only a man of great wealth but of great attachment too. What an anti-climax in this story! Jesus was turning his attention from the love of self to the love of others; from selfishness to generosity; from attachment to detachment; from dependence on the material to reliance on God. Jesus, The eternal Wisdom, was leading him to make a wise fundamental preference for the things that are above, which are "esteemed than sceptres and thrones" and "incomparable to any priceless stone" and before whom "gold is a pinch of sand" and silver ranks as mud (First Reading, Wis. 7: 7-11)." But he was too attached, he was too ignorant to understand and too blind to see. When we are attached to wealth, there is the danger of insecurity, poverty, and fear if we must let go. Therefore, we hold on to it.

The Eye of the Needle: By alluding to the camel passing through the eye of a needle, Jesus is teaching us about the dangers of attachment to earthly riches. Those whose earthly needs and desires are well satisfied can all too easily become comfortable and self-reliant, avoiding the total surrender to God demanded by the gospel – not to mention the risk of becoming self-indulgent, arrogant, and inconsiderate of the poor. The great temptation is to trust in one's status, ability as a substitute for trust in God alone. St. Paul exhorts the people of God through Timothy that "The love of money is the root of all evils" (1 Tim. 6: 10). He is reminding us that eternal life is by God's grace and not by mere human efforts. It does not depend on how much we can obey the Commandments and avoid sins nor on how much we can do anything; but by how much we can cooperate with the grace of God in communicating God's love to others. Eternal life is not by merit but by grace.

My dear friends, like the young man, sometimes we ask the right questions, get the right answers, but are either afraid of the unknown, or lack the courage to follow through. Today Jesus is also telling us: "Go sell all you have." He is telling us to let go of the earthly

possessions we are holding on to; to discard what is dragging us back and slowing us down; to eschew self-centred actions and embrace more altruistic behaviours. He is inviting us to a life of love and wisdom. Jesus is telling us that to gain eternal life, we must detach from the earthly and attach to the heavenly. May the Lord bless us with His riches, grant us the grace of humility in prosperity, generosity to share, the prudence to have the right attitude and the wisdom to let go of what is not needed.