



OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

Twenty-Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year B

Homily

[*Wisdom 7:7-11; Psalm 90; Hebrews 4:12-13; Mark 10:17-30*]

On this Thanksgiving weekend, we pause to reflect upon the many gifts we receive from the merciful hand of our loving God. Our minds turn naturally to the gifts of life, of family and friends, of food and shelter, and so on. Within this context of Thanksgiving, we receive the Word of God today, and in its light, we see another gift of great significance for which we can all be enormously grateful. It is the gift of knowing the One to whom we can turn for the right answer.

The need to get the right answer and know where to find it is the major preoccupation of the world right now, as we deal with questions of great import. For example: What is the best way to prevent the spread of COVID? How are we to deal with climate change? Where is the right path to reconciliation with Indigenous peoples? For each of these, we want earnestly to know the right answer, yet on each of them we find ourselves before a wide range of experts proposing different responses. This situation leaves us confused and frustrated, not sure who we should listen to, and at times we are placing ourselves at odds with our neighbours, or even family members, as we accept and cling to one position over against another. Clearly, the issue of who can give us the right answer needs clear and swift resolution.

That is precisely what we are given in today's passage from St. Mark's Gospel. It announces Jesus Christ as the One to whom we can always turn for the right answer to any and all questions that bear upon human existence. In fact, as we probe this text, together with the other readings, what becomes clear is that Jesus is the only One to whom we can reliably turn for the direction we seek.

Saint Mark recounts for us an encounter between a certain man and Jesus. The man comes forward to the Lord with what is the most consequential of all questions: "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" If there is any question to which we want the right answer, it is that one! This means we also need assurance that the one answering is worthy of our total trust. Following the answer we receive has eternal ramifications!

We can see that Jesus is very much aware of all this by the way he first responds to the man. Prior to giving his answer, he gently reveals his identity to the man so that he can have absolute confidence in the answer he receives. How he does this is quite beautiful. After the man

had addressed the Lord as “Good Teacher,” Jesus asks him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone.” Obviously, the man has sensed something good in Jesus. With his own question Jesus invites the man to ponder deeply what in fact is the source of this goodness that has drawn him. When the Lord then says “No one is good but God alone” he is not denying his own goodness; rather he is affirming his own divine nature as its source. In other words, he is saying to the man: “I am God; you can have complete trust in the answer I am about to give you.”

Let’s pause here for a moment. Jesus wants to give to us the same assurance he gave to the man that he had come to the right person. We face many serious questions on a daily basis. Jesus invites us to look within ourselves at what draws us to certain persons or messages for answers and ask, why do we call *them* good? Why are we trusting *them*? Time and time again we listen to what comes to us from television, radio, websites, social media, colleagues, and so on, without really asking if what they say, or they themselves, are worthy of our trust. There is only One who is truly good, only One we can trust absolutely, and that is God, who speaks to us in Jesus Christ. Jesus is the One to whom we must turn, the only One to whom we can turn, for the answers to our deepest questioning.

As we return now to the Gospel, notice carefully what Jesus does next. After the man had confirmed that he was following all of the commandments, we are told that Jesus looked at him. It is important not to miss this. Echoing in the background is the text from *Hebrews*, which says that “before God no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account.” Jesus is this Word made flesh, so his gaze penetrates with complete clarity to the full truth residing within the human heart. Nothing is hidden from him. It was thus that Jesus was able to tell the man exactly what more he, personally, needed to do to inherit eternal life.

The man didn’t like what he heard, though. He went away from the Lord, saddened. Jesus had seen within him attachment to wealth so strong that he was not free to follow the Lord into eternal life, and so told him he needed to let go of it. This prepares us for what we can expect when we go to the Lord Jesus as the only reliable source for the right answer to our longing. He will look within, see us completely, and make known to us how we are to change, how we must undergo conversion. However, this need not leave us sad. Recall from the Gospel that Jesus, having looked at the man with his penetrating gaze, loved him. From the infinite depths of divine love for that man, Jesus said to him what needed to be said. It is the same with each of us. Our Lord loves us beyond imagining, and wants even more than we do that we be with him for ever in eternal life. So, he will lovingly and truthfully point out to us our own need for conversion, the

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attachments of which we need to let go, so that we might follow him in freedom and joy to life everlasting.

To whom do we turn for the right answer? The Gospel is clear: only to Jesus Christ. In him, God's very wisdom, extolled in the first reading as precious above all else, has come to the world and is given to us. By placing our every question before Jesus, by opening our hearts to his gaze, and then by following all that he says to us, we can know with certainty that we are on the right track. As we offer this Eucharist in thanksgiving for God's many gifts, let us be especially grateful for the light, wisdom and direction that are ours in Jesus Christ.

Most Reverend Richard W. Smith
St. Joseph's Basilica
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