

**Sunday Homily 10/10/2021**  
**9 am Mass St Thomas Aquinas Church**  
**Fr Larry Percell**

**Today I would like to speak about spiritual freedom, the freedom necessary to answer God's invitation in today's gospel, in the Church and in our lives.** The man in today's gospel not only had many possessions, but his many possessions had him. Some scripture scholars suggest Jesus may have been inviting him to be an apostle, like Peter, James and John; but his inordinate attachment to his possessions robbed him of the freedom to respond. There have been times during my life when this Gospel has made me very uncomfortable. I have wondered if my response to God has been generous enough. But I was reassured when I read that God's invitation to each of us is always particular, that is, it takes into account our real circumstances. So, if we're married with children, it's very unlikely we will be asked to: **Sell what you have, give it all to the poor and follow me in a totally new direction.** Most of us have already made our big vocational choices, and we are now living out the implications of those choices.

But that doesn't mean that today's gospel isn't directed to us in some way. For some time now, Pope Francis has been asking us to free ourselves of ideologies. Ideologies are determined points of view, conservative vs. progressive, through which we filter reality. But the pope has said that **"reality is more important than ideas."** Encountering and accompanying real people in real circumstances is where we find God. That is the foundation of a Church that is a field hospital.

Letting go of rigid ideologies requires spiritual freedom, which we have to pray for. Life in the Spirit is ordered to openness of mind and heart, to balanced thinking and magnanimity that lead to discernment rather than to a rigid adherence to formulas. That is so unlike the world and the Church we live in today—at least here in the United States. But the pope is asking for us to become a listening church again—the church of the Second Vatican Council. This is what he means by a church of encounter and the synodal way, a process which he inaugurated this weekend for the universal Church.

The opposite of a synodal Church is a church that doesn't listen and already has all the answers for everything. The Pope wants us to build a community of faith which takes a pastoral stance first and foremost—one of compassion, mercy and inclusion—rather than a Church that leads with moralism and rules that end up disinviting and excluding too many people.

Each of us is called to seek spiritual freedom in order to discern and respond to God's desire for us. Freedom to listen is important in our communal lives and also in our personal lives—in our relationships and in the decisions of where we put our time and energies. For some time now I have been trying to listen to my body with its reduced stamina, but ideas about what I should be doing or want to do kept me from hearing my body's wisdom. Those ideas also kept me from hearing the wisdom of my spiritual director, a Sister of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary. She pointed out that while sheltering in place during the pandemic, I had experienced actual retirement and that my

body and spirit got used to it and liked it. Sometimes God is a ventriloquist—speaking to us through other people. But then she pulled out the big guns. She asked, “**Larry, what would Joan [my late wife] say?**” Almost without thinking I heard Joan saying, “**Lar, you’ve done enough.**” I knew then what God had been communicating to me, and I trust that God wants what’s best for me.

Whatever decision we are trying to make, we can trust that God is and will be with us. God labors in us and in the Church to bring about deeper faith, hope, and love—a love that listens and accompanies others so they will feel their dignity as children of God.