

Fr. John Sassani
Homily Given on October 11, 2009
Twenty-eighth Sunday of Ordinary Time
Liturgical Year B

The man in the Gospel can be, or has been, described in various ways: a seeker...rich...young...disappointed...at a turning point. We've experienced turning points ourselves – in our career, family, marriage, parish, nation, spiritual life.

This person in the Gospel seems to have a hit and run encounter with Christ. He runs up and ask the question of the ages. Maybe he looked for a facile answer. Jesus gives him the basics, the commandments. "OK, I'm good with all of that." So Jesus prepares to take him deeper. "Sell all you have, give it to the poor, come follow Me." This knocks the wind out of him, and he goes away sad. EXCEPT – I think he heard the words of Christ but had to digest their implications.

I had been in the seminary four years when I heard Christ speak with utter clarity. I was finishing my Bachelor's degree in Philosophy. I was on retreat with my classmates. The preacher began with a passage from St. Paul's Letter to the Colossians, a passage we used in Evening Prayer all the time. Often it just sounded like blah, blah, blah. But this time it was different. This is the section, speaking of Christ Our Lord:

All were created through Him, all were created for Him.

He is before all else that is.

In Him everything continues in being. (Col. 1:16b-17)

He is before all else that is. As if the lights went out and a spotlight shone on that one phrase, it made me sit up and take notice. I never heard a word the preacher said after that. When we left the chapel, I asked my classmates – did you hear that? But they hadn't heard it the way I had – they said I was reading too much metaphysics. But for me it was a turning point in the ordering of my priorities. Christ offers a great deal and He requires a great deal. The passage from Hebrews that we heard today speaks to this: the Word of God is like a two-edged sword that cuts to the heart of the matter. It is still happening to me 35 years later. Christ is ordering my priorities. I'm striving to follow, letting His priorities become mine – letting Him become the priority in my life.

The young man – the seeker – shows up in Chapter 10 of Mark's Gospel. Then he disappears but I don't believe that is the last we see of him. In Chapter 14, when Jesus is arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, we hear of a young man who followed Him, wearing nothing but a linen cloth. They seize him, but he runs off leaving the cloth behind. He has literally given away everything. And then, in Chapter 16, Mark tells us that, when the women entered the tomb, they saw not angels (as in the other Gospel accounts) but a young man clothed in a white robe. I think this was the same young man.

George Eliot said that it's never too late to become what you might have been. The young man was a work in progress. So am I. So are we all. Christ's work advances the becoming. Let's be attentive not only to what He says but to the sound of His voice – how we know when we are just thinking and when we know that Christ has spoken – and choose to let those words shape us into His faithful followers – even if it takes a lifetime!