

## **Selling the Tiara**

28th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year B)

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If you've ever been to Europe, you were probably amazed at the ornate basilicas and cathedrals. Many of them house valuable artifacts such as gold chalices decked with jewels, hand-stitched vestments, and life-sized statues. Being around all this Catholic stuff usually makes us feel the overwhelming presence of God. And yet, if we are in any way knowledgeable of the New Testament, whenever we are in these sorts of environments, there should be at least a tiny bit of us that feels uneasy.

Our Gospel story today from *Mark* is called "The Rich Man." This well-to-do man was living a Godly life. He kept all the commandments from his youth and was very concerned with his eternal salvation. But, in spite of that, Jesus tells him that there is still one major problem with his life: he had too many possessions. "Go, sell what you have, and give to the poor...and then follow me." We are told that "at that statement his face fell, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions."

Our Old Testament reading from *Wisdom* reinforces the point that the accumulation of possessions isn't what life is about. Speaking of wisdom in the feminine, the author writes, "I preferred her to scepter and throne, and deemed riches nothing in comparison with her, nor did I liken any priceless gem to her; because all gold, in view of her, is a little sand, and before her, silver is to be accounted mire."

The wealth that God calls us to is not that of nice buildings, silver and gold, and precious jewels.

Pope Paul VI, who is being canonized a saint this weekend by Pope Francis, took this message literally. For a thousand years before him, each pope had what was called the 'papal tiara.' The papal tiara was an ornate multi-tiered crown encrusted with jewels that was placed on the pope's head at his coronation upon his election to the papacy. It was a sign of his power. Pope Paul, inspired by Vatican II's emphasis on simplicity and poverty, was the first pope to renounce the tiara. In November of 1964, in the presence of the bishops of the world at Vatican II, Pope Paul placed his 10

pound/\$18,000 crown on the altar and asked that it be sold with the money going to the poor.

For as striking the connection between Pope Paul's gesture with Jesus' words in the Gospel today, "go, sell what you have, and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me," there are still a good number of Catholics who don't like our newest saint. They think his renunciation of the tiara was an insult to traditional Catholicism and some even go so far as to call him an anti-pope. How can one fault a saint for trying to live according to the Gospel?

*Until we renounce our possessions to some degree, they will keep weighing us down as we try to follow Jesus.*

Are my possessions weighing me down? Obviously, we all have possessions and need them, especially for those of you who are raising a family. But let us pray for wisdom so that our possessions, just like the rich man's, don't cause us to walk away from Jesus sad.