

28th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year B (2021)

The French have a story about a millionaire who spent his days counting all of his gold coins. Beside his palace was a poor cobbler who spent his days singing, as he repaired other people's shoes.

Although the joyful singing of the cobbler often irritated the rich man, one day he decided to give the poor man some of his gold coins.

At first the cobbler was overjoyed, and he took the coins, and he hid them. He then started to worry about his coins being discovered and was constantly going back and forth to where he had hidden them to make sure they were still there.

Overcome by a constant fear that someone would steal his coins, he stopped singing. Until the very next day, when he unburied all the coins, and returned them to the rich man saying, "here are your coins; give me back my songs."

Today's readings remind us that we do not possess anything that we should be un-willing or un-able to return to the Lord.

St. Mark tells us that a man came to Jesus with a sincere desire to "inherit eternal life." However, Jesus, needed some more information. He did not want any disciple "who had already negotiated his own contract."

Recall how the young man claimed he had observed all the commandments. He didn't lie, cheat, kill, or covet. He was a "good boy" who had convinced himself that he had earned the right, by his exemplary conduct, to follow Jesus.

And yet, his downfall was that he loved "things" more than "people." He could not imagine selling his possessions, depositing the profits with the poor, in order to walk in the way of the Messiah.

How immensely saddened was Jesus, as he realized that this rich young man was so constrained by his riches, so afraid to let them go that he exclaimed, "How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!"

So, here's the question: Is it easy to get to heaven? Or is it hard or maybe impossible? Is it even worth trying? And how much wealth makes it hard to enter the kingdom of God?

The short answer is: It's both easy *and* hard to get to heaven.

As one author [Swedenborg] wrote, "living a life that leads to heaven is really not all that hard. We don't have to be perfect, pious people who spend all of our time praying and never have an evil thought. Mostly, we just have to avoid doing dishonest and destructive things and make ourselves useful to our fellow human beings.

Unfortunately, there is often huge *resistance*, both within us and around us, to living the way our better self wants to live. We have an ideal for ourselves, and we just can't seem to live up to it. We keep on thinking, wanting, and doing the things we swore we'd stop doing.

Most of us have something in our lives that serves as an *obstacle* to happiness and peace. It may not be riches— it may be anger, holding grudges, alcohol, drugs, lust, apathy, lies, unfaithfulness, theft, or fraud.

There are also a lot of misconceptions floating around about what type of person we have to be to get to heaven. Heaven has room for all different kinds of people, not just for the bubbly, cheerful types that are held up to us as shining examples of what a “real Christian” is supposed to look like. In fact, heaven *needs* all different types of people.

Keep in mind, though, that our time here on earth is only the beginning of our real life in heaven. We spend a few decades, or maybe even a century here. That is only a tiny slice of life compared to the eternity that we will spend in the spiritual world.

Even if it takes us sixty, seventy, or eighty years to get our lives going on a positive path, all of the pain, suffering, struggle, and failure that we experience here will seem like nothing compared to the joy that will come with the “morning” of our spiritual rebirth and our life in the eternity of heaven.

Life is simply a matter of priorities, and God must always be number one.

