

Homily for 28<sup>th</sup> Sunday of year, b cycle, October 10, 2021

I suspect that many of you are familiar with the popular comic strip, "Peanuts", featuring the memorable characters Charlie Brown and his companions. One of them, Linus, is the brother of Lucy, and is best remembered for the blanket he holds tightly. Rarely is he depicted without it. He clings to this one possession. On the day his blanket is washed, he suffers greatly. Would Linus ever consider exchanging his blanket for, say, a baseball bat or football? No way! His blanket is his security.

In today's gospel reading (Mk. 10: 17-30), a young man of wealth approaches Jesus. Clearly he is a man of strong religious convictions. He has obeyed all the commandments of the Law. He falls to his knees before Jesus. He assumes the posture of a supplicant.

Jesus looks lovingly upon this man. It is the only time in the Gospel of Mark that Jesus is said to have looked lovingly on an individual. Yet the young man is a tragic figure. He declined Jesus' invitation to follow Him. The words are chilling. "He went away sad for he had many possession (Mk. 10:22)".

The young man finds his security and comfort in earthly wealth. He was bound by his possessions. They stand in the way of his gaining eternal life. Regrettably, he had not yet learned that the goods of this world are not everlasting and do not satisfy the yearnings of the human heart.

According to one biblical scholar, "The essence of the Christian faith is to put one's trust in God and to rely on him as the sole source of security and wellbeing."

Some four years ago, a disturbing article turned up on the front page of a national newspaper concerning the tragic death of a man of likely considerable wealth. The headline read, "Fourth person connected to U. S. fraudster, Bernie Madoff, commits suicide." He jumped out of a twenty-fourth story building of a hotel in mid-town Manhattan. The poor fellow was one of many of Madoff's clients who were swindled. His wealth gave him a false sense of security. When he lost his savings, he had no reason to continue his life. It ended abruptly.

In her personal journal, the Carmelite nun and saint, Therese of Liseux, writes with great insight the following words; "In my thoughts I like to return to those enchanted places where my worldly friends lived... to ask myself where they are now and what they get from the comforts of life they have in their castles and parks. I see that all of it is vanity. The only worthy possession is to love God with all my heart and to be here on earth, poor in spirit."

In heaven we will certainly no longer have any desire to find our possessions again!

This gospel represents for me a personal challenge. As someone with many possessions, especially books, I often reflect on how burdensome it will be on the day I must move all belongings to another place of residence. God help the movers! I'll then learn that so much of what I kept is excessive and, in the end, disposable.

What about you?

In the scriptural reading for the Saturday of the twenty-seventh week of the year is a passage from Paul's first letter to Timothy. In light of today's gospel, his words are worth noting:

"Tell those who are rich in this world's goods not to be proud, and not to rely on so uncertain a thing as wealth. Let them trust in the God who provides us richly with all things for our use. Charge them to do good, to be rich in good works and generous, sharing what they have. Thus they will build a secure foundation for the future, for receiving that life which is life indeed." (I Tim. 6: 17-19).

Let me close by sharing with you a famous prayer of the nineteenth century English Catholic bishop and scholar, John Henry Cardinal Newman, recently beatified by the Church:

"If I gain the whole world, Lord, and lose you, I have lost everything whereas if I lose the whole world and gain you, I have lost nothing"