

Fr. John's Homily, 28th Sunday in Ordinary Time, October 10, 2021

JMJ CHS

Jesus has more hard words for us today. Words that should shake us up a bit. He talks about how difficult it will be for the wealthy to be able to enter into the kingdom of Heaven. Well, from the response of the apostles, you would get the impression that even they thought that they were wealthy compared to some of the people they knew. And so, if it was true for them, what must it be for us? We are pretty wealthy. The poorest person in this parish is a millionaire compared to some people living not too far from us.

Well, thankfully, there was a qualifier. Jesus said that nothing is impossible with God. What is this? Is this a loophole? What can he mean? Well, let's look at it first through the eyes of the disciples themselves.

Peter and the disciples are being called upon to leave everything behind and follow Him. If they're leaving their livelihoods behind, how will they make a living? We know that Peter had a wife, and a mother-in-law. We don't know about any children. And there is no evidence that any of the other disciples were family men. So, they would have to trust in Jesus, trust in *Divine Providence*, for the days of discipleship ahead. And he reassured them that they would have an abundance of whatever they needed, for their station in life, for as long as they lived.

Now, while it may not be true for all priests, everywhere, all the time, I can personally vouch for that promise in my life as a diocesan priest. I really have no needs. I am well provided for by the Diocese of Lansing, and you, my parish family, you all take care of me quite well. You have been very generous to me. As a matter of fact, even as I was putting my thoughts together for this homily this past Tuesday afternoon, at 3:30 in the afternoon, just as I was getting hungry, someone delivered me two slices of Costco pizza. I thank you very much.

But looking into this question in retrospect from our current vantage point, Jesus has called many men and women throughout the years to serve in various ways. And I am sure they each received many types of blessings. And many, just like it says in the reading, have also been blessed with sufferings. Even martyrdom. But they have been called to live lives of poverty, chastity, and obedience. For those in monasteries or convents, they are, indeed, called to a "smaller" life than most of the people of the world.

For those like myself, in Diocesan priesthood, we do not take the vow of poverty, but we are encouraged to lead simple lives. In other words, it might not look too

good if I had a GT 40 in my driveway. That would not be a good example to you of a life of austerity in imitation of Jesus.

But as you know, the words Jesus spoke that day are not only for the ordained or the consecrated, they are also for you, the laity. And yes, they should be taken seriously. Like I said, Jesus gave a qualifier. Jesus can do anything. So yes, even you can get to heaven. But how?

Well, there are several areas that you need to be concerned about. One answer is associated with that statue we have out in front of the church, *Jesus the Begger*. The homeless Jesus with his hand out, looking for a handout. There's no need to give you the whole quote. The one line on the plaque should suffice. ".....and the king will say, 'Whatever you did to one of these, the least of my brothers and sisters, you did to me.'"

And so we should all review how well we do in the charity department. And all you have to do is use a little imagination. Picture yourself standing before the throne of God on your particular day of judgment. The day you die. We should all be prepared to make an accounting of our lives. Very simply, did we care for the poor? Did we share of our *time, talent, and treasure*? *These are the principles of stewardship that are important in the Catholic Church.*

But what's most important, is what is implied in that admonition, that we be prepared to enter into a relationship with the poor. To write a check to help someone far away is great, and we do it all the time, but are we prepared to interact with the poor? To talk with them? To listen to them? To smile at them? To touch them? Some of the saints we celebrated recently are pretty good examples of what I'm talking about. St. Francis, the poor man of Assisi whom we celebrated last Monday, kissed a leper.

St. Vincent dePaul was remembered the Monday before. His charity was recognized by a man named Fredrick Ozanam who named a charitable society after St. Vincent. And our chapter here has a very good reputation for its interaction with the poor.

But there is another way that deserves our consideration and it also involves a Saint that we celebrated very recently, St. Therese of Lisieux, also known as "The Little Flower". On the one end of the scale, the surest way to get into heaven is to be martyred. And that was young Therese's desire. But it became apparent that that was not going to happen to her. She pondered the problem and in the scripture found the major clue that ultimately led to her becoming a saint, and, not only that, but a Doctor of the Church. It's called a simple way to salvation.

Maybe you have heard of her classic example of picking a pin off of the floor. I had a little fun with the kids the other day at the school Mass. Before Mass, I came to church throwing, not pins on the floor, but little pieces of garbage. It was my intent to watch the kids as they came in to see if any of them would stoop down to pick one up. The little experiment almost failed because all of the adults who came in to Mass early picked up those pieces of garbage. I guess they learned their lesson well, a long time ago. But whether it's a pin, or a gum wrapper, or a branch that falls into the road, you could ultimately pick up those artifacts of salvationout of love.

Perhaps the greatest quote with regard to the simple way of salvation comes from St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta, who once said, "Not all of us can do great things. But we can do small thingswith great love." And again, simple things like smiles, can go a long way.

So there you have it. The impossible becomes possible with God because he recognizes charity, loving your neighbor as yourself.

Now let me finish with a quote from this morning's Office of Readings. This is advice given by St. Paul to his spiritual son, Timothy. St. Paul says, "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 will they build a secure foundation for the future, for receiving that life which is life indeed."

~Fr. John