

You Are Lacking One Thing
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In the gospel we have just heard, a good man—a very good man—comes to Jesus seeking eternal life. He is an admirable man who has kept all of the commandments. But as faithful as he has been, there is something lacking in his life. And so he asks Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus knows that this is a good man; and he looks upon him with love.

This is not a story about a sinner who comes to Jesus for forgiveness. It is the story of someone at a critical juncture in his life. It is the story of a very good man who has the opportunity—if he seizes the moment—to come to the fullness of life. It is the story of each one of us.

Although this good man has kept all of the commandments, there is something amiss in his life. The man himself understands this otherwise he would not have asked Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life. Knowing that this good man is at a critical point in his life, Jesus calls upon him to take an extraordinary step. He invites the man to sell what he has, to give alms to the poor, and to follow him in the way of discipleship.

The problem is not clear. Although the man has kept all of the commandments, he is divided in his love for God and his love for his possessions. He is not at peace with himself because he has withheld something from God who has given everything to him. His possessions have become his security. His possessions have deceived him into thinking he is in control of his life. His possessions stand between him and eternal life. The one thing he lacks is total and complete trust in God. The one thing he lacks is the courage to abandon his possessions so that he can abandon himself to God.

This is the story of each one of us, it is not? We are good people. We observe the commandments. We live a Catholic way of life in a time when others have left the church. But there is often a nagging feeling that something is missing. There is often a haunting sense that our relationship with God is not whole and complete. Perhaps it is a sense that our religious life is more formal than spiritual, more legalistic than life-giving. And so, like the rich man of today's gospel we ask, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?"

It is at this point, if we listen with our heart, that the Lord looks upon each one of us with love and says, "There is one thing that still prevents you from giving yourself to God." For some of us, it may be our attachment to the things we possess. For others it may be the excessive need for achievement and success. For some, it may be the need for the admiration and approval of others. For still others, it may be an addiction or habit we refuse to let go. Whatever it is, it is that one thing, which prevents us from following Christ wholeheartedly and single-mindedly. And until we shed that one thing, we will never be at peace with ourselves. We will always be like the rich man who observed all the commandments but withheld something from God, who gives everything to us.

At the end of today's gospel, Peter says that he and the other apostles have given up everything to follow Jesus. In reply, Jesus says that whatever they have given up they will receive a hundred fold in the present age, and eternal life in the age to come. God will not be outdone in generosity. The more we surrender to God, the more we receive from God. The less we keep for ourselves, the more we have for ourselves. But first we must surrender that one thing that prevents us from following Christ with an undivided heart. For only when we surrender our life will we receive our life in eternal life.

Every choice involves a sacrifice, and before we can open a new door we must close an old door. And so it is with the Christian life. If we choose to follow Christ, our choice will involve a sacrifice. If we open the door to discipleship, we must close the door to an old way of life. In a few moments we will receive the Eucharist and enter into the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection. As we enter into this mystery of Christ's death and resurrection, we ask for the grace to close that door that prevents us from following the Lord so that we may open to the door to newness of life.