

Archbishop Lori's Homily: 28th Sunday in Ordinary Time; Annual White Mass

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Basilica of the Assumption

Oct. 14, 2018

One morning I was making my usual holy hour in the little chapel located in my residence, right next door. During that rather fitful prayer session, my mind wandered. I found myself looking around at the beautiful things in the chapel, including a lovely statute of the Blessed Mother that Cardinal Hickey gave me when I became a bishop many years ago. I found myself thinking, "This chapel is the best thing I have!"

Next thing I know, I'm praying a Psalm about a man who loses everything. The psalmist grows embittered over his bad fortune as contrasted with the good fortune of evildoers. But suddenly coming to his senses, he asks: "Whom else have I in the heavens but you, O Lord? None besides you delights me on earth" (Ps. 73:25). Reading those words, I was shaken out of my torpor and was wide awake spiritually. I realized that my greatest possession is not my chapel or my books or my position. In the end, they will count for little or nothing. Only the Lord is my life and my salvation (Ps. 27:1).

A Shocking Gospel

Today's Gospel is also meant to wake us up spiritually. If it hasn't already, my words

probably won't do the trick either but, of course, that won't keep me from trying!

So, as you recall, the Gospel portrays Jesus' encounter with a wealthy young man. This young man was an observant Jew who had kept the Commandments faithfully; yet, something deep within him was restless, something was unfulfilled, unsatisfied. So he kneels in front of Jesus, as if to acknowledge him as Lord, and asks the most important question any one of us could ever ask: "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" This is *the* question about the meaning and destiny of one's life. Deep in the young man's heart, there were yearnings that could not be satisfied either by his own efforts at goodness or by the many things that he possessed. Deep in his heart was a persistent doubt that his goodness was a ticket to paradise, the way to eternal life with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In addressing Jesus as "good teacher", the young man did not know how right he was; he did not know how profoundly "good" Jesus, the Son of God made man truly is! And as if to probe the young man's dissatisfaction, Jesus recites the Commandments which the young man had obeyed since he had come of age. Next, Jesus did something that is recorded nowhere else in the New Testament: St. Mark tells us, that Jesus looked at the young man with love. Jesus gazed upon the man with the look of love that should have won over his heart and prompted him to surrender his attachment to all he owned and held near & dear. If only this young man had seen that look of love. If only he had seen it!

Jesus then put his finger on the source of the young man's dissatisfaction with his life. Rightfully he had kept all the Commandments but he lacked one thing: he needed to go, sell all that he had, give it to the poor, and then follow Jesus. For this young man, that was the path to life's ultimate meaning and destiny. Holy poverty was the key opening up the Kingdom of God, life eternal. And we know the sequel. The young man, held captive by his many possessions, went away sad and the disciples, still in the thrall of a gospel of prosperity, were dumfounded when

Jesus said, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the Kingdom of God!” Jesus, the living Word of God, sharper than a two-edged sword, cut them to the quick. Jesus knew what was going on in their hearts and he revealed it to them. He knew that some were harboring false and dangerous ideas about the Kingdom. He wanted them to understand that the Kingdom of God is not something they could achieve or possess. It is God’s gift that can be received only when we utterly surrender ourselves, all that we have and all that we are, to the Lord.

The Cure

In that moment, Jesus had the disciples’ undivided attention just as I hope the Lord has captured *our* undivided attention this morning. Living as we do in a prosperous society where professional credentials count, where one’s reputation counts, where it’s important to advance in one’s career— these words of Jesus may feel like being doused with cold water. For, more often than not, we regard ourselves much like the young man in the Gospel. We may feel as though we are trying hard to live as good Christians. We may be able to point to considerable success in keeping the Commandments (if not all of them all the time, then at least most of them most of the time!). We may even be able to say that we are generally generous and gracious to others, both in our personal lives and our professional lives. Yet, like the young man in the Gospel, we may find a gnawing dissatisfaction deep within us - a voice that recognizes our attainments but also tells us that they’re not enough. As a result, we turn to the Lord and to the Church for advice, hoping for something not unlike a prescription to cure that ache deep within us. Whenever we do so, the Lord, the Divine Physician, looks at us with love but in our anxiousness to get out of his office, we too might miss his look of love. Instead we might say, “Just give me something for this pain, Doc, & I’ll be on my way.” But instead of a tidy little prescription - like tips on how to pray better or how to overcome some minor fault - rather than that - we are told that our distress will not be relieved unless and until we totally

surrender all that we have and all that we are to the Lord. Instead of being told by the Divine Physician, “Take two of these and call me in the morning,” we are hauled into the operating room and cut open by a two-edged sword that separates “soul and spirit, joints and marrow.”

Opened ever so skillfully, the Lord sees what lay beneath our exterior righteousness, the hidden parts of our lives that keep us from entering the Kingdom of God, the preoccupations, the enmities, the grudges, the attachments to sin, the overweening human pride, the reliance on possessions and power. And to cure us, the Lord calls for a complete reordering of our priorities and plans, a realignment of the inner workings of our hearts, just as he did when he encountered the rich young man in the Gospel. I know about this first hand, because that’s what the Lord has been doing in me, with great intensity, since August, when the crisis in the Church was unleashed, a crisis which has rightly caused me to do a lot of soul-searching and a re-ordering of how I must try, in God’s grace, to carry out my ministry.

Conclusion

Today we are blessed by the presence of many medical professionals and especially by the leadership of the Catholic Medical Association. Thank you for the way you go about curing us in body, mind, and spirit. Thank you for plying your professions in imitation of Jesus, the Divine Physician. There are many things that set you apart from your colleagues who either have no faith or who have marginalized faith in their professional lives, among them, a keener sense of human dignity and higher code of ethics. But even more fundamental than that is a profound readiness to give of yourselves, your God-given skill, your professional attainments to the Lord and to the patients whom you serve with great dedication. For you, medicine is not a mere occupation or profession but indeed a vocation of healing inspired by the great and mighty Healer, the Lord Jesus Christ, by whose wounds you and I are healed.

As you go about your daily work and glance upward from time to time, may your eyes of faith catch hold of the Savior, looking at you with love, looking at you through the eyes of the patients for whom you care, especially the sickest, the poorest, and the most vulnerable. And may the Lord bless you and keep you always in his love!