

I was reading a story this week about a pastor that went to visit one of the families in his parish rather unexpectedly. They invited him in and had a seat in the living room. The mother wanted to make a good impression with the pastor so she said to her little daughter, "Please run and get that good book we all love so much and bring it here." The daughter ran off and then returned in a minute with triumph on her face and the Sears catalog in her hands.

Some people like to use today's Gospel as ammunition for condemning wealth. They're quick to quote, "It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of God!" It's as if they expect everyone to run out into the desert to eat locusts and wild honey like John the Baptist. Or they expect everyone to be like Saint Francis of Assisi and renounce their financial security to live lives of radical poverty.

While these are valid ways to follow Jesus, we're not all called to take the same route to holiness. To me, Jesus is using exaggeration to make a point. He isn't so much condemning wealth as He's teaching us about proper perspective. The unnamed man approached Jesus with a sincere desire to know what he must do to inherit eternal life. He had a sense of his own mortality and a hope for eternal life. He expected Jesus to provide a few clear cut rules to follow. Instead, he got an unexpected reply. Jesus looked upon him with love and asked something of him that would prove to be too difficult for the man.

The man had followed the commandments of the Law of Moses since his youth but Jesus wanted to take him deeper into God's plan for his life. Jesus told the man to give his possessions to the poor then come follow Him. Unfortunately, the man went away sad because he had many possessions.

For the man, the reward wasn't worth the sacrifice. Eternal life wasn't worth letting go of his earthly possessions. He wanted to hang onto the things that he valued more than God; things

that actually kept him from recognizing the reality of God's love for him and from being the person God created him to be. For the man, his attachment to his wealth was the obstacle preventing him from following Jesus completely.

To most of us here today, it probably seems like such an easy choice for the man. Surely, we would make a different choice when faced with the same decision. We would do exactly what Jesus prescribes. We would gladly give our possessions to the poor in order to inherit eternal life.

Or would we? We're not that different from the unnamed man. Our world revolves around money. We work to earn money. We stress about how to earn more money and if we'll have enough to last us an entire lifetime. We become anxious about how to best spend our money. If you think about it, we devote a lot of time concerned with money. But the funny thing about money is that it can buy us a house but not a home; medicine but not health; amusement but not happiness; and a crucifix but not a Savior.

Maybe an unhealthy attachment to wealth isn't the obstacle preventing us from following Jesus completely. Maybe it's something else. Our obstacle could be ambition, or a relationship, or social status. Could be drugs, or sex, or power. It's different for each of us. Whatever it is, these unhealthy obsessions prevent us from handing everything over to God. We hold a little back. We say, "I'll give God anything He wants, except for this one thing." We keep something off limits to God. We don't give ourselves entirely to Him. We value something above our relationship with God. We settle for less than God wants for us.

Like the man in the Gospel, we too have a sense of our mortality and a hope for eternal life. Our Lord looks upon us also with love and asks of us something that is difficult. Hopefully, we can learn from the Gospel and it won't prove to be too difficult. Jesus asks us to go beyond

just coming to Mass for an hour every week. He calls us to holiness. It's up to each of us to discern the route He wants us to follow. It's not an absolute commandment for each of us to give away all of our possessions. But He is saying that we must free ourselves from the things that possess us. We must remove the obstacles that stand between us and Him.

Too often though, we focus on having to lose something, on sacrificing something. We lock in on what we must give up to follow Jesus instead of what we have to gain. We focus on having to stop gossiping at work. We focus on having to part ways with the friends that drag us down. We focus on having to give up our self-centered lifestyle to shift our concern to others. We focus on the discomfort of changing our lives. We're too attached to ourselves and to this world.

But this world is not our reward. This world isn't our destiny. We're only here for a short time. We're destined for more - for eternity with our Creator. When we rid ourselves of the attachment to the things of this world, we're able to receive new relationships in the Body of Christ, new possessions that are the fruit of doing and hearing the word of God, and the most cherished possession of all, eternal life; which is a gift of God.

Brothers and sisters, our God didn't hold anything back from us. He didn't make anything off limits to us. He gave up everything to become one of us. He gave up everything to provide us an opportunity to be with Him in Heaven one day. He gave up everything, even His own life, to die on the cross for each of us.

If our hands, and our hearts, are already full with possessions and obsessions, there might not be any room for God's presence. Jesus' words call us to think about what we have, and what has us. If there's anything in our life that we refuse to surrender to the Lord, we don't possess it; it possesses us.

Our true identity is not based on our possessions and our obsessions. It's based on the fact that we're created in the image and likeness of God. The Kingdom of God is within us. The unnamed man in our Gospel was not able to respond to his heart's deepest longing because of his shallow desire to hold on to his possessions. And he remains unnamed, without an identity. On the other hand, we know the names of the apostles who left everything and followed Jesus. Their identity comes from their relationship with Jesus. So can ours.

We're called to be like the author of our first reading today. We should pray for the wisdom to discern the ways of God – to want God above all else. Jesus desires to lead us deeper into God's plan for us. Jesus wants everything from us, the good and the bad. What are you holding back from Him?