

Homily – Mark 10: 17-30
28th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B
9th October 2021, Riverstown

A monk was lost in meditation at a river bank. A rich man offered him two exquisite jewels. As soon as the devotee left, the monk picked up the jewels and threw one of them into the river. One of his disciples immediately jumped into the river. But he could not find the jewel. The disciple asked the monk to point out the spot where the jewel had fallen. The monk gently picked up the second jewel and tossed it into the river, and said, “Right there.” The disciple was totally disappointed. And then, the monk looked at him with compassion and said: “Do not allow yourself to be owned by objects. Only then you will be free.”

The Scripture Readings of today remind us that we do not possess anything in our life that we refuse to surrender to the Lord. In reality, these things often possess us, and we become prisoners of our possessions. And this is very powerfully depicted in the Gospel of Mark when he speaks of that man coming up to Jesus asking him: “Good Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life? “. Luke in his account of rendering the same story would portray the man coming up to Jesus ‘as a ruler’, and Mathew in his account would

explicitly call him 'young'. So, we have a young man who is a significant leader in the community who has many possessions. And interestingly enough, Mark in the Gospel of today tells us that the rich young man comes 'running up to Jesus'. He wants a quick and easy answer. And Jesus tells him: "You must keep the commandments".

But this righteous man responds to Jesus saying: "Well! I have kept all the commandments ever since I was very young". But still, there was something lacking in him. The rich young man was restless and empty. And, Jesus challenges the young man to share his riches with the poor. He says: "There is one thing you lack. Go and sell everything you own and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me". In fact, Jesus was asking him to dispossess himself and then in freedom to come and follow Him. Jesus was telling him to give up his material wealth and status, and then raise himself up to God's providential care.

Now, what does this mean to us? How do we bring this word of God to life?

If you should visit St. Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin, you will find an old, weathered door dating back to the year 1492. In the center of this door, you will notice

that a section of the door is missing. One of the planks making up the door has a section that has been hacked out of it: about five inches wide and a foot or so high. So what's the story behind the door?

There was a huge conflict that took place in the year 1492 here in Ireland between two major clans: the Butlers of Ormonde and the Fitzgeralds of Kildare. And the disagreement centred around the position of Lord Deputy. In 1477, Gerald Fitz Gerald became the Lord Deputy much to the dismay of the Butlers. The tension broke out into open warfare in 1492 and a battle was fought. The battle went badly for the Butlers and Black James, nephew of the Earl of Ormond, and his men fled from the battle field and took refuge in the Chapter House of St. Patrick's Cathedral. The Fitzgeralds followed in hot pursuit. Now realizing that the fighting was out of control, Gerald Fitzgerald, the leader of the Fitzgeralds through the closed door pleaded with Black James to accept a truce. Yes! Gerald wanted peace without any conditions. But Black James refused. He refused any conversation fearing they would be attacked and slaughtered. And finally, in one magnificent act of bravery and generosity, Gerald Fitz Gerald had his soldiers make a hole in the middle of the door. And then, speaking through the hole, he told

Black James that he would stretch his hand and his arm through the door in a gesture of reconciliation. It was a brave and risky endeavour, but he did. He put his hand through the door, and he reached in with his arm and James took his hand and a pact was made and the division was over. And that door, which we see in St. Patrick's Cathedral even today, is known as the door of reconciliation.

Now, what does this mean to us? Well! All of us do cling on to something or other in our lives. And Jesus asks us to take a risk, make a statement, and take a chance. Remember! Whoever makes the first move is noble. We need to dispossess ourselves and put our hands, our arms through the door and let go. And then there will be peace. And that is what Jesus says to this young man: "dispossess yourself and you will be free".

A story is told of a poor beggar who lived on alms he received from begging. One day on his begging rounds, he came upon a holy man in a forest, who was lost in prayer. Approaching the holy man, the beggar asked for alms. And without a second thought the holy man gave him a large precious stone that someone had gifted him. The beggar could not believe his eyes and he ran home with this stone. He clutched it so tightly that his hands hurt. All along the way, he was suspicious of everyone

and reached his hut, 'tense and worried'. He could not sleep that night even for a moment for fear of losing the stone. Finally, he made up his mind and early in the morning the next day, he hurried to the holy man in the forest and quickly gave him back the stone.

The Holy man asked him why he was returning the precious stone. And the beggar replied: "I don't want the stone! It is ruining my life! But I want something else from you. When I asked you for alms, without a second thought you parted with that precious stone. Can you give me that spirit of detachment? Then I will be happy whether I have or don't have anything!"

Dear brothers and sisters, 'that is what we should pray for today'; for that spirit of detachment which will make us truly happy. Some people are poor, so poor, so absolutely poor that all they have is money. And, if all you have is only money, you are the poorest person in the world. Because, there is more to life than money and material wealth and there is a way more to life than what money can buy. And so, if we truly want to know how rich we are, drop a tear and see how many hands come forth to wipe that tear. God bless you all, **Amen.**