

“Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit

Once upon a time, a young door-to-door salesman, assigned to a rural area, drove up to a farmer, who was seated in a rocking chair on his front porch, chewing on a blade of grass. The salesman got out of his car, went up to the rocking-farmer, and said:

“Sir, I have a book here that will tell you how to farm 10 times better than you’re doing now.”

The farmer didn’t bother to look up. He kept rocking. Finally, he said to the enthusiastic salesman:

“Young man, I don’t need your book. I already know how to farm 10 times better than I’m doing now.”

That story is a good illustration of what Jesus is talking about in today’s Gospel, which I just read to you from St. Mark.

The farmer was capable of farming better, but ...the proverbial **BUT** in life, he lacked the commitment to do so. The rich man in the Gospel was also capable of doing more... than just keeping the commandments, but he lacked the commitment to do so.

Today’s Gospel story makes it painfully clear that there’s more to Christianity than just keeping the commandments. Jesus reviewed, for the rich young man, the commandments, which are the **STARTING POINT** of the Christian life. Christianity is a life-style...not a single-minded-focus of dealing, solely, with the commandments.

The young man said that he had kept them all. He hadn’t done one thing in his life to, intentionally, hurt anyone. Jesus admired him for this. **BUT**...Jesus also made it clear to the rich man that **Christianity** is far **more than just a set of generally, negative commands**—like not stealing, not lying, or not cheating. **Christianity** is **far more positive**. Jesus said to the rich man, in effect:

“Granted, you’ve never intentionally hurt anyone, BUT, what have you done to help anyone? Have you used your surplus wealth to help feed the hungry, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless?”

It was, at this point, that the rich man saw how sadly he was still lacking in perfection. So, Jesus held out to him a challenge, saying in effect:

“If you want to follow me, transform your vision. Stop viewing ‘goodness’ negatively—as not hurting people. And start viewing ‘goodness’ positively—as helping people. Do this...and you will find true happiness in this life and in the next one.”

In down to earth words, the challenge Jesus held out to the rich man was this:

“How badly do you want eternal life? How badly do you want to follow me? Do you want these things badly enough to sacrifice some of your possessions for them?”

The rich man answered in so many words:

“Master—I do want them, BUT not that badly.”

And so, the rich man rejected Jesus’ invitation. The thought of using his surplus wealth for anything other than himself or his family... was, well, just too great a sacrifice.

And this brings me back to us, in this church and those within the recorded sound of my voice through cyberspace.

Many of us are like the farmer on the porch. We know how to be a better Christian 10 times better than we are being right now, **BUT**..., so often, we lack the commitment to do it!

Many of us are like the rich man in today's Gospel. We, too, for the most part, have kept the commandments, **BUT**...we haven't been able to reach out as generously as we could to help others...the needy, the naked, the hungry...even to our own relatives, in certain cases.

This raises 2 questions. What are they, you ask. Well... I am glad you asked that question!

1st, what do we do if, in fact, we find ourselves in the situation just described?

Do we sit on the porch of life and 'rock away,' as the farmer did?

Do we lower our head and 'walk away,' as the rich man did?

What **DO** we do?

The Gospel suggests the answer. Right after Jesus tells his disciples that:

"It is much harder for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle," they cry, **"Who, then, can be saved?"**

Jesus replies, **"This is impossible for man, BUT... NOT for God."**

In other words, we can do nothing by ourselves to begin with, **BUT**... with God at our side, everything is possible.

2nd, how, then, do we enlist God's help?

An old adage says, **"God helps those who help themselves."**

Another says, **"If we walk toward God one step, he'll run toward us 10 steps."**

The answer to our question lies right here.

The way we seek God's help is not merely by asking him for it in prayer. We should do this, of course. **BUT**, we should also do one thing more. We should take the first step and help ourselves. We should reach out to someone in need, even if it's only in a small way.

Once we take the first step, God will come running toward us 10 steps. He will support us and show us the way from there.

Today's gospel is **NOT** an invitation to make a great journey all at once. It is merely an invitation to take the 1st step of that journey.

If we take the 1st step, by reaching out to someone in need, God will come running toward us, take us by the hand, and walk at our side for the entire journey. It's Christ living in us; we living in Christ. It's a lifestyle. And it's called... Christianity!

I now close with St. Ignatius of Loyola's Prayer for Generosity:

"Lord, teach us to be generous.

Teach us....

To serve you as you deserve;

To give and not count the cost;

To fight & not heed the wounds;

To toil and not seek for rest;

To labor and not ask for reward;

Except to know...

That we are doing... your... will."

May our Almighty God, our Abba, bless you...
the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.