

## HOMILY

### *The Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time* *October 10-11, 2009*

**Rev. Andrew A. Czajkowski**  
**St. John the Evangelist Parish**  
**Davison, Michigan**

There is one good thing about a recession. It sobers us up. If we're lucky, it causes us to turn our backs on things we don't need and to hold close the things that really matter. But there's more at stake when we look at the big picture. That's why it's important for us to deal today with the man who comes up to Jesus asking what he must do to inherit eternal life. You know the story well. When Jesus told him to "*Sell what you have and give to the poor...*" he went away sad. He had many possessions.

This has been a difficult year for many people. In our country many jobs have been lost, incomes have fallen and, in some cases, homes have been lost causing an unbelievable strain on family relationships. Many of us do not feel very rich. Yet compared to most of the people who have ever lived, we are rich. The story of the rich young man could get us thinking. No matter how much wealth he had, he could not ride in a car or van, have any surgery, turn on a light, buy antibiotics, hear a pipe organ, watch TV, wash dishes in running water, mow a lawn, fly in an airplane, sleep on an innerspring mattress, or talk on the phone. If he was rich, then what are we? **We're rich!** Some of us are rich in material things and some of us are rich in the things money can't buy. There **are** some things that money can't buy. If we forget that, we will lose our soul.

The Dalai Lama—the Buddhist leader—said that when traveling to the USA he is frequently invited into the most luxurious mansions imaginable, including Hollywood mansions. He says those who reside in those mansions want for nothing. They have it all, according to the world's standards. And, yet, he says he feels loneliness and sadness in those mansions in a way that he never feels when he is visiting the poor little villages of impoverished countries, including his native Tibet. He says members of these tiny communities in what we used to call the Third World or Developing Countries don't feel the same greed, envy and deprivation that we do. Everyone is in the same boat—keeping body and soul together is a common goal.

In Western societies based on consumerism, we look to things to make us happy instead of looking to each other. We believe that the latest iPod, the newest fashions, and a cable hookup with five hundred channels will fulfill us. And we suffer for it, because when the thrill of a new acquisition wears off, we feel a vague, nagging sense of dissatisfaction. And so we look for new products to buy rather than examining the deficits in ourselves and our relationships.

**Some of us are rich in material things and some of us are rich in the things that money can't buy.**

So when Jesus says 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, does he mean we have to give up everything to follow Jesus? It depends...

For the rich man who came to Jesus—yes! Jesus knew that this young man didn't own his wealth; it owned him.

For still others—yes! Some people take Jesus literally and own nothing for themselves—people like Francis of Assisi and Dorothy Day. That's why to this day there are people who have given us everything they own and go and serve the least and the lost. God bless them. They truly make the world a better place because of their sacrifice.

But is this required of everyone? The answer is we don't have to give up everything to follow Jesus. However, we have to give up something. If we have never given up anything because of our love for Jesus, then we need to do some soul searching. At the heart of the Gospel, at the heart of being a follower of Jesus, is the power of giving.

British missionaries in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century knew this. As they departed from England to Africa, many packed their possessions in long, narrow wooden boxes; their own coffins. They knew that more than likely they would return home in those coffins, felled by disease, exhaustion and violence. Many did.

God has not called most of us to be missionaries, nor has God called us to give everything we own to the poor. But he is calling us to give something because of our faith in Jesus.

Salvation is not determined by what we've given up for God, but what God has given up for us. We are not saved by what we give up but by our ties to Jesus. We have not given all we should, but God has given enough for everyone. The Disciples were startled when they heard Jesus say it was easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for one who is rich to enter the Kingdom of God. So they asked, "*Then who can be saved?*" Jesus looked at them and said, "*For human beings it is impossible, but not for God. All things are possible.*" In other words, salvation doesn't depend on what we do but on what God has done in Jesus Christ. God has accepted us as we are.

A young woman named Karen was waiting to board a bus to New Jersey. She noticed a tall disheveled man trying to get on the same bus. He and the bus driver were arguing because the man didn't have the right amount of money. Finally, the man got out of line and stumbled against all the other people. Then he spied Karen. He asked her, "Would you please give me some money so that I can get on the bus?"

What would you do in that situation? Karen hesitated and said, "When I get on the bus I will see." In the next 30 seconds as she walked up the steps to the bus and dropped in her \$1.25 fare, Karen quickly thought through what she should do. She said the sort of things we say to ourselves: "Why should I help him? Why should he get a free ride? There are so many other people who have greater needs." Karen had noticed he was carrying some mail with a check on top. "He just needs to go cash that check. It's probably a welfare check. He'll just spend it on something ridiculous."

On the other side Karen reasoned with a mind of faith: "Don't you have any compassion? Where is your Christ-likeness? Okay, Lord," she asked, "what should I do?" And before she knew it she said to the bus driver, "Wait! Don't close the doors. Leave them open and let him in and I'll pay for him." The bus driver opened the doors, the man ran up the steps, looked at her and smiled, and just said, "Thanks."

Then God seemed to speak to Karen and this is what God said:

*"Karen, do you see? That's what I did for you. No, that man didn't deserve your \$1.25. He didn't do anything to earn it, but you gave it to him as a gift. And you did nothing to deserve my acceptance either. I sent my Son for you. My Son died on the cross saying, 'Open the door, Lord; open the door, Father. Let her in. I will pay for her.'"*

And in that sobering moment Karen realized again the grace of God in her life.

You and I are rich in many ways. Christ isn't calling us to give up everything to follow him, only to give sacrificially. What matters most of all is not what we do for God, but what God has done for us. God has given his own Son to throw wide the gates of heaven...and it was for us.

