



Twenty eighth Sunday Ordinary Time 2006

Wisdom 7:7-11 Hebrews 4:12-15 Mark 10: 17-30

We are offered a single sentence from Hebrews which contains a powerful picture.

God's Word can be likened to a two-edged sword. It is living and effective. It is sharper than any sword and it both penetrates and divides.

God's Word gets to the heart of things and it divides the real from the unreal so that we are forced to confront it.

This meditation is like a landscape in which to consider the other stories. They are both about rich men, It applies also to rich women. The first subject is Solomon, son of David and Bathsheba. Having inherited the throne he set about consolidating his power. He loved God, and obeyed the statutes of his father, David, but he took part in religious sacrifices outside his tradition. This was considered by the prophets to be one of the ultimate sins against God.

He is described by the author, a Jew from Alexandria in Egypt, as an ideal figure, a model king. The writer uses Solomon's voice in this passage.

In the first six verses he describes his conception, birth and early nurture to emphasise his place among the common people. Solomon was not like others because he had inherited the throne of David. It had not been won by conquest or coup. He had prestige, money and power.

In a dream he heard God offering him the choice of a gift. Solomon chose wisdom. The meditation says that Solomon placed wisdom above his throne, money, health and sight. He believed that his continuing prosperity came from placing wisdom first.

The second rich man was also a good man. He was very earnest and pursued Jesus for advice. He wanted to know how to share in everlasting life. Jesus first responds to the title the man has given him. "Why do you call me good? God alone deserves that title?"

Jesus then proceeds to go through the commandments concerning our relationships with others. The rich man is able to say that he has kept all the commandments since his childhood. Jesus looked at him lovingly then offered him a share in his own life-style. "Go and sell what you have. Give it to the poor. Your new treasure will be worth a lot more. Then come and join me."

The rich man had received an answer he didn't expect. It was an answer he couldn't cope with. He turned away because he had too many other possessions. He probably hoped to be asked to be a benefactor, maybe to enable Jesus' work through philanthropy.

Two good men, both rendered larger than life because of money. Solomon's goodness was flawed by political fears. He entered into political marriages, which brought power but also the influence of the pagan religions.

The young man of the Gospel was flawed because the invitation was outside his imagination. He wanted the idea of spiritual growth without cost to himself. He sought spiritual riches but couldn't cope with the loss of earthly riches.

Jesus then addressed his disciples. "If you're rich it's hard to be a kingdom person." Jesus didn't say "*impossible*" just hard.

We then have the wonderfully exaggerated picture of pushing a camel through a needle, a kind of verbal cartoon. It had the desired effect. The disciples were overwhelmed. They ventured the opinion that the membership of the kingdom would be quite small.

This is an important understanding because the disciples recognised that possessions come in all shapes and sizes. They don't even have to be material. Peter was quick to point out that some of them had already put aside everything.

Jesus then tells them that the ability to be a follower comes from God who will give the strength needed.

The promise of Jesus is striking; the fellowship of the kingdom may mean estrangement from some family members, (as in Jesus' case) but for every loss there will be a hundredfold gain of new families, new relationships.

Jesus did not ask his followers to sever relationships with families but to accept the persecution of misunderstanding should it arise.

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