

Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time – B  
Fr. Chad S. Green  
Holy Family Catholic Church  
Kirkland, Washington  
14 October 2018

Wisdom 7:7-11  
Psalm 90  
Hebrews 4:12-13  
(Matthew 5:3) Mark 10:17-30

*With Jesus We Have Everything*

This past week the thirteen of us newer priests, who have been ordained in the Archdiocese of Seattle the past five years, gathered at the Retreat Center at the Palisades in Federal Way. We had a two-day retreat with Archbishop Sartain, Bishop Mueggenborg, and Bishop Elizondo. We all went through the seminary program together, so this annual retreat is good for us to be together again as brothers; to catch up on how things are going in our new ministry; and to continue to learn from our Archbishop and Bishops.

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One of the topics we discussed was how we live in community with one another as diocesan priests. During the conversation, Bishop Elizondo shared with us his experience, which was different from ours, because he was not a diocesan priest like we are. Before he was ordained Auxiliary Bishop of Seattle, he was a member of a religious community called the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit, founded in Mexico.

As diocesan priests (like me, Fr. Nagel, and Fr. Steve), we are ordained for a diocese (a territory cared for by a bishop), and typically serve our entire priesthood at parishes within that territory. We are part of a large brotherhood of priests within our diocese, but our day-to-day ministry is mostly out on our own at our individual parishes.

As a member of a religious community (like Bishop Elizondo was part of), priests, brothers, and sisters are sent out on mission to where ever in the world there is a need for their ministry. But, where ever they go, they go in a group; they have their religious community with

them. And an important part of living in a religious community is their shared vow of poverty, which means that the members own no personal property. Everything that a religious community has is shared by all, and the goods of the community are distributed to those who have need of it. One of the advantages of a life of religious poverty is that they are not weighed down by possessions. They are freer to follow Jesus where ever in the world He calls them to serve.

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When Bishop Elizondo was a young novice (a new member of his community), his experience could be likened to that of the Rich Man called by Jesus in today's Gospel. In order to enter his religious community, he had to, in a sense, sell what he had.<sup>1</sup> By following Jesus in this particular vocation, he had to give up any claim to possessions or any pursuit of wealth. As a young man – probably filled with a lot of zeal<sup>2</sup> – he showed great faith and hope that by this radical act of giving up everything and following Jesus, he would receive much more in return in this life, as well as “eternal life in the age to come.”<sup>3</sup>

Very soon, he would learn that making that making a radical act of faith and hope is one thing, and then living it out and learning how to live it out is another. Bishop Elizondo told us about a memorable experience for him when his parents gave him a new watch. After receiving the gift, as an obedient and faithful member of his community, he went to his superior and handed the watch over to him. He said, “My parents gave me this watch as a gift. Since I don't already have a watch, may I keep it?”

His superior said, “OK, thank you. We will take it and see who in the community needs a watch.” A little bit confused, Bishop Elizondo said, “Yes, that one is me! I don't have a watch. Since my parents gave this one to me, and I don't already have one, I was hoping that I

could keep it.” And his superior simply replied, “OK, thank you. We will take that into consideration.” And Bishop Elizondo never saw the watch again.

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To me, and maybe to you, as well, that sounds like a harsh lesson for a young man to learn as he began religious life. More than the *monetary* value of the watch, we’re probably thinking of its great *sentimental* or *symbolic* value. That watch was a *gift* – a sign of *love* – from his parents. *Why wouldn’t the superior recognize and honor that?*

Well, we shouldn’t assume that his superior *didn’t* recognize the value of this gift from his parents. After all, his superior was at one time a young novice himself, who also had to learn the same “harsh” lesson of religious poverty. And the lesson isn’t that we don’t need family and gifts and signs of love. Or that they aren’t important or don’t have value. We *do* need these things. They *are* important and valuable.

The lesson is that, even though we need family and gifts. Even though family and gifts are important and valuable. There is something – there is *Someone* – that we need even more: *Jesus Christ*.

**With Jesus: even when we have *nothing*, we have *everything*.**

**Without Jesus: even when we have *everything*, we have *nothing*.**

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Now, I think you’ll all agree that what I’ve said is *absolutely true*. But it can also feel a bit like an abstract spiritual claim, can’t it? ***With Jesus, we have everything we need.*** And when we’re here at church, we can profess our belief in this Truth with our worship, prayers, and songs. Maybe you’re familiar with the old Spiritual Gospel Hymn with a simple refrain that captures this Truth:

*In the morning, when I rise,  
Give me Jesus.*

...  
*You may have all this world,  
Give me Jesus.*<sup>4</sup>

But how do we put our belief, our prayers, our songs into practice? How do we make this spiritual truth a tangible part of our lives?

And, furthermore, what are we to make of Jesus' challenge in today's Gospel? Is Jesus really calling *me* to sell what I have, give it to the poor, and follow Him? Or is something that radical only for religious priests, brothers, and sisters?

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My friends, Jesus *is* calling *all of us* to do this. Not just the Rich Man in today's Gospel. Not just the Apostles. Not just religious priests, brothers, and sisters. He's calling all of us: diocesan priests, married couples, single people, children and adults.

Maybe it looks different for each of us. Some of us are – but most of us are not called to a dramatic moment where we leave everything behind to enter a monastery or a religious community. But it doesn't mean that Jesus isn't calling each of us to something similar and as challenging in our own vocation and state in life.

Perhaps there are multiple moments (big and small) throughout each of our lives, in which Jesus calls us to leave something behind in order to follow Him more closely. There are both spiritual and practical aspects to realizing and living out this call from Jesus.

The spiritual aspect is to spend time in prayer.<sup>5</sup> At least twenty minutes a day.<sup>6</sup> I can't tell you what Jesus is calling you to. Like the Rich Man, each of us has to go to Jesus Himself with that important question: *Jesus how are You calling me – in the circumstances of my life and my vocation – to follow You more closely? What are You asking me to leave behind so that I can make You more of a priority?*

The practical aspect is to put this principle into action. To make room for Jesus in your life by getting rid of excess wealth, possessions, and gadgets. These don't have to be bad or harmful things. There was nothing *bad* about Bishop Elizondo having a watch from his parents. But there was something *greater* that he was able to have because *he let it go*.

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Maybe we're not quite ready to, or maybe we're not yet called to sell *everything* we have. But is there some place we can start? Or the "next step in following Jesus" that we can take?<sup>7</sup>

Clean out your garage or closet. Make a monetary gift to a good cause that you've been thinking about. Share your toys and games with your brothers and sisters. Give away wealth and possessions that you don't need or aren't using. There is someone else in your community who does need them.<sup>8</sup>

By letting go of wealth, possessions, and gadgets that we don't really need or aren't using, we give ourselves a gift. We make more room for something – for *Someone* – even *greater*.<sup>9</sup> We make more room for *Jesus* in our schedules, in our hearts, and in our world. And when we have Jesus, we have everything, and we know that we are on our way to Heaven.

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 10:21

<sup>2</sup> The Rich Man initially showed his zeal in that he "ran up [to Jesus]" (Mark 10:17). Our goal (and challenge) in the spiritual life is to keep our zeal for following Jesus, rather than "[go] away sad" (Mark 10:22).

<sup>3</sup> Mark 10:28-30

<sup>4</sup> *Give Me Jesus*, Traditional Spiritual Hymn

<sup>5</sup> Wisdom 7:7: "Therefore I prayed, and prudence was given me; I pleaded and the spirit of Wisdom came to me."

<sup>6</sup> As Fr. Nagel has encouraged each member of our parish for many years.

<sup>7</sup> From the *Holy Family Parish Prayer*: "Heavenly Father, please send your Holy Spirit upon our parish community, to help each of us take our next step in following Jesus..."

<sup>8</sup> This is not an act of *charity* as much as an act of *justice*. See *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)* 2446:

"St. John Chrysostom vigorously recalls this: 'Not to enable the poor to share in our goods is to steal from them and deprive them of life. The goods we possess are not ours, but theirs.' 'The demands of justice must be satisfied first of all; that which is already due in justice is not to be offered as a gift of charity':

When we attend to the needs of those in want, we give them what is theirs, not ours. More than performing works of mercy, we are paying a debt of justice."

Also see CCC 2536: "The tenth commandment forbids...the desire to amass earthly goods without limit."

<sup>9</sup> See Wisdom 7:8-11