



40th European Meeting of Young Adults

Go sell everything you own

Just then a man came up to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to gain eternal life?" "Why do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments." "Which ones?" he inquired. Jesus replied, " 'You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honor your father and mother, and 'love your neighbor as yourself.'" "All these I have kept," the young man said. "What do I still lack?" Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.

(Matthew 19:16-22)

Meditation for November (No. 3)

The young man in Matthew's account that we read this morning has a deep question that expresses a very strong desire for a communion with God. He is in search of a life full of meaning. How to live a life where God is the center of everything? One might even say that he asks Jesus: What does God really want from me? One has the impression that the young man is ready for anything!

Then Jesus answers him by quoting the last five of the Ten Commandments, which speak of this love for one's neighbor being put into practice. The young man responds by saying that he has always kept these commandments. And yet, he feels that it is not enough! He is looking for more. Did Jesus purposely give him an answer that did not satisfy him? It is as if Jesus wanted to make the young man understand for himself that it is not the law that will allow him a personal and direct relationship with God.

Then the young man insists: What am I lacking? What more must I do? Jesus says to him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." These are rather unexpected words from Jesus and cause a kind of "shock" in the young man.

Jesus' first answer did not live up to his expectations, but now the answer goes too far, it is too radical! According to the gospel of Mark, Jesus looked at him and loved him before uttering these words. Jesus is not putting him to the test. He does not say these words to bother him! But rather, he sees into the depths of this young man's heart. He sees that his wealth and possessions are making him a "slave". His wealth prevents this young man from being free and – as we say in today's language – from being himself.

This man was ready to do much to obtain life in fullness with God, but he did not imagine that the true answer resided rather in renunciation. A brother of our community who has lived in Bangladesh for a long time writes: "To live our vocation as a brother, it is not only a matter of saying 'yes' to Christ, but also of saying 'no' to things that prevent us from living this vocation." What prevents me from being free to follow Christ? What prevents me from being able to give the best part of my heart to God, to others?

Before the narrative of the rich young man, there is the story of the way Jesus welcomed children. He says tells us to welcome children, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to those who are like them. Being rich means being able to organize and control your life as you please. Becoming a child means being available for what life gives us, for what God gives us.

So what is our challenge or our problem today? Perhaps not so much great wealth, but for example looking for a comfortable life, looking for some ease. Is this perhaps the challenge that Jesus offers us? To understand, as Brother Roger said, that "nothing really beautiful is built in ease".

The young man went away sad, because he had great possessions. It may not be the end of the story. It is quite possible that he will return later to Jesus, with joy and simplicity. Instead of an end, it is perhaps the beginning of a story, the beginning of a life following Jesus.

Questions for sharing in small groups

- ▶ How can I make room for my desire to live life fully with Christ?
- ▶ What prevents me from living with God fully?
- ▶ What are my fears about the choices I would like to make?
- ▶ Living as a child, how am I to do that?