

## Pentecost 20 (28 Ordinary Sunday) Year B

11<sup>th</sup> October 2015

**Readings:** Amos 5:6-7, 10-15, Hebrews 4: 12-16, Mark 10:17-31, Psalm 90:P13-17

**"Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, 'You lack one thing; go, sell what you have and give the money to the poor.....then come follow me'"**

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: **Amen.**

My dear friends, the above quotation from the answer that Jesus gave to a rich man who thought he had kept all the requirement of the law and needed a nod of approval from Him came as a shocker to the questioner. What do we make of this and what does the church want us to reflect on today?

In the first reading the prophet Amos, a champion for Social Justice, warned the people of God to seek God while He was still to be found. He was scathing about the rich who were preying on the poor and weak and asked them to remember that wealth does not last forever. He asked them to change their ways and emphasised that if they change their ways and seek God, He might relent and have mercy on the people.

The second reading from the letter to the Hebrews states that the word of God is living and active, sharper than a two-edged sword. It is able to judge the thoughts and the intentions of the heart.

In the Gospel, Jesus uses an opportunity from the question asked by a self-righteous rich man to teach about the dangers of relying so much on wealth and all the things that go with wealth. What Jesus said about wealth was contrary to what the disciples had believed. The Jews believed that the prosperity of the rich was a sign of God's blessing. Jesus, on the other hand, presents wealth as something that was a stumbling block to the Kingdom of God. In other words, Jesus is saying that love of possessions and comforts is one of the chief obstacles in the way of discipleship.

Why this young rich man came to Jesus we may never know. But we know that people can become so satisfied with life that they think there is nothing else to do and that life couldn't be better.

He asked Jesus what he must do to get eternal life. As a young man who had kept the law and did all that was needed, he thought it was all over and that eternal life awaited him. But he was surprised that he needed to do more. When he could not understand what Jesus was saying about giving his wealth to the poor, he lost all hope and walked away sad.

This reminds me of a true story that happened when I was a young parish priest somewhere about forty-two years ago. A member of the parish who was a transporter with up to twenty Lorries on the road was regularly worried about the safe return of the Lorries every night. From 6.00 p.m, he would start shouting and lamenting about the safe return of the Lorries. If you visit him accidentally, the first thing he would ask was whether you have heard anything about his Lorries. This habit continued for a long time until he became ill.

Doctors tried all they could, but the illness persisted. He was nearly at the point of death when a wise Doctor suggested that he got rid of all his Lorries barring his private car. Initially he resisted but eventually, wise counsel prevailed. As soon as the Lorries were got rid of, there was a dramatic recovery. I am not going to narrate to you how his life turned out; it suffices to know that he lived another twenty years after the incident.

This is just a story but I think a relevant one. Jesus wanted to free the young man from the addiction to possession and to show him the path of caring and compassion but that was too much for him. So he walked out.

Many a time, it is not only our material possessions but also our addiction to our own way of life and our interpretation of reality that stands on the way of the Gospel. Many a time these place huge obstacles in our relationship to God and our neighbour.

What actually is Jesus saying to us today? Is he saying to us that material possessions are bad? That is far from the truth. Jesus was not condemning material possessions in themselves neither did he call on all his followers to give away everything they have to the poor. He was not trying to make us feel guilty about what we have.

The life of the poor, with its hardship and suffering, is not set forth as an ideal for the Christian. Neither is the desire for possession and accumulation of riches. Jesus himself had some reasonably well off people among his disciples

and he knew that people had to think of their needs and security. What Jesus was telling us was that it is dangerous to be attached to riches to the extent that everything else becomes a non issue. Those who had the most of material things at times are so reliant on them that they forget eternal life. He was saying that those who think they have physical things should not forget that they are stewards of that which is God's. They should not allow self-interest to blind them to the needs of others.

By implication, Jesus not only warns those who take advantage of the poor but also condemned the unjust distribution of wealth which is an offence against the human brotherhood.

This was the same attitude that the prophet Amos condemned in today's first reading.

Like the young man, we all come to Jesus with our conceived ideas about ourselves, our abilities our wealth and a host of other things.

We must make sure that they are not stumbling blocks to the hearing of the Gospel and a secure place in the kingdom of God.

With these in mind my dear friends, let us continue our celebration.

In the Name of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: **Amen.**