

A Bible Bullet (aimed at the heart)

Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle B
Wisdom 7:7-11; Hebrews 4:12-13; Mark 10:17-30

This week's Gospel reading strikes sharply at the hearts of many Americans like you and me. It's that camel and the eye of the needle story again. As we struggle with the needs and pressures of each day we do not think of ourselves as among the rich. Yet we know in our hearts that compared to the many desperately poor of this world, we are rich indeed. The challenge is there for us to study this Word of God, pray about it, decide what the Lord is saying to us, and then do something about it.

If we look at the first verse of this reading we see the excitement and passion of this young man who came "running up" to Jesus. We have reason to believe that this dear young fellow expected to be welcomed and probably congratulated for living a life in obedience to the Ten Commandments. As this becomes apparent the verse tells us that Jesus "looked at him with love" and told him to sell all that he had and give the money to the poor. Then he would be ready to follow Jesus. Talk about a cold shower for one who was so passionate! Commentators offer at this point that once Jesus came to give us the Law of Love, obedience would no longer be determined by **what we do not do** but rather by **what we do out of love** for God and others. The Ten Commandments are guidelines for our behaviors but not a test of the quality of our love.

The reaction of those who are trying to follow Jesus is one of bewilderment. The Scripture tells us that "they were completely overwhelmed" and began to ask how anyone could expect to enter the kingdom of God. Jesus' answer is salvation for us all:

“For man it is impossible but not for God. With God all things are possible.”

So where does this lesson leave us? Perhaps we are always where the young man is--overwhelmed and in need of quiet contemplation. In each situation of life we are confronted with the example of Jesus' love to use as a paradigm for our own life styles and choices. Jesus is perfection and we will never match up but we must always strive to draw closer while always trusting the loving mercy of God. However, reading the Word of God with an open heart can only lead us to a painful reflection. This is the message from the second reading to the Hebrews:

God's word is living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword. It penetrates and divides the soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the reflections and thoughts of the heart.

This is what the words of Jesus did to the young man in our story: penetrated and divided soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It sounds painful--and it is. Amen.