

Readings

Wis 7:7-11

Ps 90:12-13, 14-15, 16-17

Heb 4:12-13

Mk 10:17-30

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What do you think God is asking of you today? What are you willing to give to God? Are there limits to your response? Can you name them? In what ways do you hold back, ignore, or even say no? Why?

These are just a few of the challenging questions of discernment on the spiritual path. Questions we ask people to consider in their discernment of the Augustinian way of life and questions that professed religious are compelled to ask of ourselves continually at every stage of our lives. The very nature of our call to love God and surrender ourselves to His will means that our giving and our receiving in this mutual relationship with God are proportional to whether or not we are doing the daily work of doing our best to follow God.

Most of us would wholeheartedly sing the words of this week's psalm, *Fill us with your love, O Lord, and we will sing your joy!* Perhaps we would even all agree with one another, as like-minded individuals of faith, that we hunger and thirst for God alone: that *Our hearts are restless until they rest in you.* Are we not those very believers who follow in the footsteps of the man in today's gospel in that we run to Jesus, and even dare to ask, *Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?* We long for more of the Jesus who inspires and heals us.

Be careful what you ask for! You might just get it!

From the earliest days of my life as an Augustinian I prayed for Wisdom. The sacred words in today's first reading from Wisdom summon our souls to our highest calling, reminding us that through our hope in God and faith in Divine Wisdom, *...all good things together came to me in her company, and countless riches at her hands.*

Such inspirations and prayerful promises fulfilled can be measured in our spiritual and temporal experiences, and understood in proportion to the fruits of faithful prayer and the expanding landmarks of awareness of God in our own personal salvation history. Hopefully we are all blessed with moments where Wisdom sheds her curative light on our shadowy understanding with moments of clarity, healing and spiritual insight.

But then what? If the inspiration and the answer to prayers might be considered what we ask of God, then what might God ask of us? This is where it can get a bit tricky. This is where our resistance might emerge as the discomfort of change knocks from within.

St. Paul reminds us today in his letter to the Hebrews, *Indeed the word of God is living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating between soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and able to discern reflections and thoughts of the heart. No creature is concealed from him, but everything is naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must render an account.* Paul reminds us that God wants our heart and understands our unfaithfulness. But He will eventually demand your whole heart, not just your own discrete measure! For the heart is the mother of mercy, the heart is the inspiration of compassionate action and the resting place of true spiritual healing and freedom. The heart is the door that opens to the soul, and the soul is where we know God's presence and will. For these virtues to be operative in our day to day life, at home, in the office, or at school, we must surrender such challenging things as our deep-seated

preferences, our desire for esteem and success, or sometimes even our opinions; for these are the very manmade things that harden our hearts and create resistance to God's will being done.

Mark's gospel today places this question *'What do you think God is asking of you today?'* front and center. In great admiration and love for Jesus, the man in the gospel runs to Jesus and kneels before him - isn't that what we do so very often in our lives? What we are in church doing this very Sunday? The man is inspired with the desire give after he has felt the gift of receiving by being in the presence of Jesus. So Jesus invites him to empty himself out and follow him unreservedly. Here is where we shift from what we want from God to what God wants from us. The man's *face fell, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions*. Is this also us?

Not everyone is asked to walk away from their material possessions, but all of us are called to give things up. In my youthful prayer for Wisdom I could never have anticipated what God would ask me to give up in my fifties. As it has turned out for me, to grow in wisdom means letting go of what I want in favor of what God asks. A purification. A transformation.

If God's requests are not always material sacrifice, what might God also be asking of you? Of me? Perhaps in Jesus' invitation to follow him we are asked to abandon an old hurt, resentment, grudge or anger that we choose to cultivate. An unforgiveness that we foster in our moments of self-pity, insecurity or fear. Our preference for health or wellness, or even a bad habit through which we repeatedly 'hide' from the Lord and thus damage ourselves. Maybe antagonistic ideas that advance the unhealthy us-versus-them mentality in our global culture that is unraveling the very fabric of kindness and empathy in our shared world these days.

Whatever it is, we all have our thing that is our subtle resistance to the invitation to empty ourselves of whatever possessions we cling to, material or emotional, and follow Jesus. We enjoy

the experience of grace and inspiration but often shy away from the hard work of letting go. Our habits and prejudices are strangely comfortable, so we would rather not leave them, even when they hurt us or are even killing us. This is our shared fragile human condition.

For you, for me, this letting go is the next step. God is patient with us, but we are often afraid, self-absorbed or stubborn. The great spiritual writers and mystics have told us that, while it is a little scary, when we allow ourselves to be emptied God will fill us up again with Himself. He will make whole what is broken, He will heal wounds, He will soften hearts, He will forgive sins. How can this be? In today's gospel Jesus responds his disciples similarly incredulous question *Then who can be saved?* with, *For human beings it is impossible, but not for God. All things are possible for God.*

Let us do what we know best how to do and fall to our knees in front of Jesus, for our human strength is not enough for such transformation. Let us examine our consciences and thus open the window for Wisdom, for the Holy Spirit to act through our hearts in our lives, as we live in hope for the transformation that is only possible through God. Let us encourage one another to let it go and follow Jesus even farther.

Peace.