

10. October 2021

The rich young man

Mk 10:17-27

'Jesus was setting out on a journey when a man ran up, knelt before him and put this question to him, 'Good master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?' Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: You shall not kill; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not give false witness; You shall not defraud; Honour your father and mother.' And he said to him, 'Master, I have kept all these since my earliest days.' Jesus looked steadily at him and he was filled with love for him, and he said, 'You need to do one thing more. Go and sell what you own and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.' But his face fell at these words and he went away sad, for he was a man of great wealth. Jesus looked round and said to his disciples, 'How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!' The disciples were astounded by these words, but Jesus insisted, 'My children,' he said to them, 'how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for someone rich to enter the kingdom of God.' They were more astonished than ever, saying to one another, 'In that case, who can be saved?' Jesus gazed at them and said, 'By human resources it is impossible, but not for God: because for God everything is possible.'

Why is it so difficult for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God? The disciples were amazed at what Jesus was telling them, and their amazement was even greater when he uttered this sentence: *"It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for someone rich to enter the kingdom of God"*.

What was the context of this statement? The disciples had heard with their own ears the question that this pious man addressed to Jesus, having approached Him in humility and sincerity. He really wanted to attain salvation! Jesus answers him by referring him in the first instance to the commandments that he must keep in order to be with God in eternity.

We can be affectionate to this man (Matthew's Gospel presents him as a young man), for he could affirm that from his youth he had kept these commandments. There are few who can say this about themselves! And blessed are they!

Jesus also loved him and wanted to offer him an even greater love: *"You need to do one thing more. Go and sell what you own and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me."*

At this point, the young man was unable to continue. He was not able to accept this invitation of Jesus. Why? Certainly he received the grace at that moment to take that step, for we know that the Lord does not ask for something without at the same time granting the necessary grace to fulfil it.

So why did he refuse? The text itself gives us the answer: *"But his face fell at these words and he went away sad, for he was a man of great wealth. Jesus looked round and said to his disciples, 'How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!'"*

So the obstacle was his great material possessions, to which his heart was so attached that he could not let go of them. Material possessions seem to give a man a sense of security and perhaps also make him look great in the eyes of others. It is therefore a value that not only gives an apparent security on a personal level, but is also seen as such by other people. Thus, the social position and prestige that comes with wealth also come into play here. It can also be seen as a gift from God.

All this made it difficult for the man to let go. Perhaps he saw before his eyes something akin to nothingness: to give up everything, to lose any security, to have to take a kind of "leap into the void"?

In any case, we know that he was dejected and left sadly. Apparently, he had not counted on Jesus to respond to him in this way. Perhaps he also realised that the Lord had "put his finger on the sore spot", that he had mentioned the key point, and sensed his attachment and did not want to let go.

Jesus let him go and did not hold him back or try to convince him in any way. Instead, he gave a teaching to his disciples, who were astonished at his words: *"Jesus insisted, 'My children,' he said to them, 'how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for someone rich to enter the kingdom of God'".*

The disciples' fright increased even more, and they could not understand why Jesus said such words. Perhaps they felt pity for this man; perhaps they reflected on what would have happened to them if they too had had so much wealth. Perhaps they thought Jesus' reaction was too harsh, for they had witnessed this man's piety and perhaps they had grown fond of him.

In view of Jesus' words, the big question they now asked themselves was, *"In that*

case, who can be saved?"

Indeed, who can be saved? This question leads us to a great depth, and we will come to the conclusion that no one can do it in his own strength. No one can save himself! It is impossible for man! In the case of the man in today's gospel, the hindrance to responding fully to the Lord's loving invitation was his riches. In other people it will be this or that. Mostly we will find the person entangled or attached in one way or another, even if it is someone truly pious and virtuous. In the end, he ended up turning away from Jesus in sorrow!

But the Lord does not leave his disciples in their questioning and doubts: *"Jesus gazed at them and said, 'By human resources it is impossible, but not for God: because for God everything is possible'".*

With these words, Jesus gives an answer also to all of us: it is God who saves us, it is His love that seeks us, it was His grace that was first. In Him we can abandon ourselves, beyond our weakness! With His grace, we can leave everything and follow Him.

And what happened to the man who went away sorrowful? The Lord did not withdraw His love from him. In fact, he had kept the commandments from his youth, by God's grace. Although he was not able to accept Jesus' invitation at the time, perhaps he could never forget the Lord's invitation.