

TWENTY-EIGHTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
Year B: Wis 7:7-11; Ps 90; Heb 4:12-13; Mk 10:17-30
October 10, 2021
Fr. David Pignato

“What must I do to inherit eternal life?” This was the question the rich young man eagerly asked Our Lord Jesus. The young man had evidently been reflecting on the direction of his life and the purpose of his life, and he was asking the great question that all of us should ask throughout our lives: “How do we accept God’s offer and invitation to live with Him forever? How do we get to Heaven?”

Jesus must have been very pleased and impressed with this question from the young man, because the offer of eternal life was the whole reason He had come into the world. *“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life”* (Jn 3:16). Jesus came into our world *“so that [we] might have life and have it more abundantly”* (Jn 10:10). So, when the rich young man asked how to obtain eternal life, Jesus must have been very pleased that someone was looking for what He came to bring.

The answer that Jesus gave to this question teaches us so much about how to live our lives and also about the possibility of a vocation from God to live an even higher calling. In answer to the young man’s question, Jesus first said, *“You know the commandments: You shall not kill; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; you shall not defraud; honor your father and your mother”* (Mk 10:19). He was telling the young man, and all of us, that the first requirement to obtain eternal life is to live this life here on earth in obedience and fidelity to the Commandments of God. The Commandments give us the parameters of our freedom and orient and point our lives here on earth toward the great goal of eternal life with God. If we want to live forever with God in Heaven, Jesus says, we need to start by living faithfully to the teachings of God here on earth. And this includes what we are doing now, keeping the Lord’s Day holy by worshipping God at Mass, in fulfillment of the Third Commandment. Whenever we obey the Third Commandment by coming to Mass, we are choosing to accept the Lord’s offer of eternal life and keeping our souls on track for Heaven.

The rich young man was eager to tell Jesus that he already was faithful to the Commandments. *“Teacher,”* he said, *“all of these I have observed from my youth.”* In response, Jesus said to him, *“You are lacking in one thing. Go, sell what you*

have, and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me” (Mk 10:21). Jesus was inviting the rich young man to live an even higher calling, to do even *more* than the Commandments require, to make an even *greater* offering of his life, by renouncing his many possessions and following Christ and living as Christ did, in radical poverty. As Bishop Robert Barron explains, the Commandments are for the spiritual and moral life like the basics or fundamentals of a skill or sport, like the stance, grip and swing in golf. Without these basics, the golf game cannot be played well, or at all. And the Lord’s call to renounce all possessions and live a life of poverty is like the “advanced training” in a sport, when a person learns how to excel and perfect the game (cf. Reflection in *Magnificat*, October, 2021, p. 146). Not all of us are required to sell all our possessions, but God does call some souls to live in such a way, to follow Him more closely, and it’s a higher calling, with a greater offering of self to the mission of the Church.

Just this past week, the Church celebrated the feasts of St. Francis of Assisi and St. Bruno. St. Francis was from a wealthy family in Italy in the 13th century, but he renounced his family’s wealth and embraced a life of radical poverty, so that he could imitate more closely the way that Christ lived and focus more intensely on preaching the Gospel, without distractions. St. Bruno also felt the call in the 11th century to forsake his privileged life in Germany and to embrace a radical life of poverty and penance, and he founded the Carthusian Order, which remains today the most austere and rigorous religious community in the Church. St. Francis and St. Bruno are just two examples of people in the history of the Church who were invited, as the rich young man in the Gospel was, to make a greater offering of their lives to God and embrace a higher calling of closer imitation of the Lord’s way of life.

As Christians, all of us want to know how to receive the Lord’s gift of eternal life. For all of us, that starts with obeying the Commandments, which point and direct our lives to God. But for some, it also includes the call to make a greater and more radical offering of our lives, to do more than the basics and fundamentals of the Commandments, and to pursue the perfection of a life lived in imitation of Christ. All of us are called to be holy, but some are called to pursue holiness by imitating the Lord more closely. And, the Gospel instructs us to be alert and ready, if we hear the Lord asking and inviting us to make a greater offering of our lives to Him, for His glory, and for the salvation of souls.