

Homily  
October 13, 2024  
28<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time  
19:48 – 32:05

The Word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword.

Anybody bring a sword with them this morning? (Laughter) Hope not. Have you ever seen a truly sharp two-edged sword? They're frightening. Now if you've seen anything in the movies, especially "The Lord of the Rings," you've seen what they can do. They cut that way (sweeping to the right) and swung around they cut the other way (sweeping to the left). That's pretty powerful.

The Word of God is like that. It does cut both ways: to this and to this.

Our First Reading comes from the Wisdom Literature, the Book of Wisdom, which we heard just a couple of weeks ago, Chapter 2. Now we're in Chapter 7 and the author, 50 years before the birth of Jesus, in Alexandria, Egypt, writes in the person (if you will) of Solomon – the great wisdom person among all the great kings of Israel. He was also the wealthiest of all the kings of Israel.

And in the person of Solomon, we hear that Solomon wants wisdom first. Because wisdom is of God and it's from God. And it will guide. Even though there is wealth, gold is said to be dust, diamonds are nothing and silver is mud, mire.

But wisdom – wisdom is central to living the Covenant of Moses. Now, the passage does not say that wealth is bad. Remember, it cuts both ways. It says that wisdom is paramount, and the wealth is compared to the other stroke of wisdom. It must find its meaning there.

Which takes us to the Gospel passage, which clearly is a reflection of this First Reading and vice-versa.

A young man comes running up to Jesus, as we heard, and asks, "How do I get into the Kingdom of God? How do I gain eternal life?" And he's very sincere about it.

And Jesus, after reminding him that only God is good, says to him, "You know the Commandments." If you notice, the Commandments he recites are not about God. They're about how one relates to other human beings and to the community.

The young man says that he's already been doing that. He's been doing it since he was a youth. And then comes this (sweeping to the left). "Yes, you have. But there's one thing more. Let go of your wealth. Give it away. And come follow me."

And he walks away sad. For he had, as it says, many possessions.

Now, the sword here (sweeping to the right), describing what the young man has already done is wonderful. The sword here (sweeping to the left), does not condemn him. It does not say you're wrong in having wealth.

And this is directed only to him. "This is what I need you to do, the next step. You're doing well. You're doing right. Here's another step. Can you take it?"

He can't. But Jesus does not condemn him as he walks away. You notice that? As the young man walks away, Jesus, turns to the disciples and scares the heck out of them.

"How hard it is for the rich or wealthy man to enter the Kingdom of God."

**What?!** Jesus, our ancestors, all of the traditions of Judaism tell us that wealth is a blessing from God, and it should be received as that and then used as a blessing. If you have it, we're supposed to share it as you can, to be benefactors and whatever you have will remain a blessing. So how can you tell us this? That if you've got it, it's going to be hard to enter the kingdom of God?

They were astounded. And I don't blame them. I'm sure that for many of us here, this is one of those Gospels that we really "get nicked" by (sweeping hand to the right). It's a hard one.

Then Jesus uses this wonderful image. That...Does anybody have a camel in your back yard? Probably not. But the people of Jesus' time would completely understand this. He says, "It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle (groans), than for the wealthy to enter the Kingdom of God."

When was the last time you tried to thread a needle? You know, you try to poke it through, and it doesn't want to go. And then you (lick it) and you poke it through again and it still doesn't want to go. I hate that moment!

And NOW it's a camel? Jesus is using an image from the city of Jerusalem. There were the main gates. But there were extra gates, auxiliaries. In times of desperation, when people had to get in quickly.

So, they were very narrow.

Camels were a sign of wealth. And you know why? Not because they would spit at you. They were beasts of burden. They carried wealth from caravans. They carried food to feed the people. They were very valuable.

But to get through that gate, all the wealth that was on them had to be unloaded and left behind, in order to get through. The camel gets through. The owner gets through. What's left behind may not make it.

Still the disciples are astonished, "Then who can be saved?" Well, it's impossible for humans, but not for God. Because it is God who saves you.

It's not our wealth. It's not our own doing. It's not our best intentions. It is a gift.

Now, few of us here are wealthy. Is that fair? Mike, are you wealthy? - He asked, "What did I do?"  
(laughter) Your hearing aid's off? Yeah? Thank you, Michael. That just makes me feel so much better. - I'll ask you later. Thank you. .

But you know, actually we are all very, very wealthy when you compare us to the rest of the world. We are the wealthiest nation on the planet. We have the greatest distribution of wealth, although it's getting a little skewed right now.

Most of the world cannot imagine how we live. Now I'm not saying this is a bad thing. Remember (sweeping right), we are blessed. But where lies our security? Is it in what we have? Or is it from the Lord first?

So in a simple two questions, I'm going to bring this to a close.

The first question is, How much time do you put-in praying? Or reading? Or discussing your hopes about God in your life? How much time in a day? That's a good thing.

How much time, then, do you spend on your wealth? Your concerns about your income? How you're going to pay this? What's the future? Am I going to have enough...?

You know – just on and on and on. Balancing the checkbook.

(Displaying both sides of the sword, turning into a scale.)

Then where's the balance in all this?

Is the One the source of your hope in Christ?

Or is it what you have?

I ask myself this question on a regular basis.

(Balancing)

What's first? What's most important?

The Wisdom of God? The love of God in Christ Jesus and my response to it?

Or things?

I'm not saying bad things about "things." Okay? They're both good.

But what's first?