

For those of us who grew up Catholic, and perhaps for those who have converted to the faith, our religious life began as a keeping of the commandments. We learned these from our parents and teachers. We knew what we had to do to get to heaven. We tried to do it and felt guilty when we didn't. Today's Gospel suggests that Jesus too saw the keeping of the commandments as a normal starting place. His answer to the man who wants to know how to inherit eternal life is to follow the commandments, several of which he recites. The questioner is quite satisfied that he has kept all the commands yet has a sense that something more is required. Jesus confirms that hunch in the second part of his answer. Keeping the commandments is in fact not enough to gain inheritance into the kingdom of heaven. So Jesus looks on the man and loves him and says: what remains is that you get rid of your possessions and come follow me. This invitation, which the man finds so unexpected and unacceptable, emerges from the depth of Jesus' love for the man. He's asking for a burning of the bridges that will allow the man to belong totally to Jesus and so to find the life that he is looking for.

What Jesus asks of the man of many possessions is what he asks of every man. He loves every man and woman and wants to be their everything. Solomon found that the wisdom he sought was superior to everything else in his life: scepter and throne, riches, priceless gems, gold and silver, health and beauty and even light itself. That is what Jesus is for us: he is wisdom incarnate, the pearl of great price—in him all the riches of heaven and earth are found, and if we have him we have everything, all those riches as well.

The invitation of this Gospel is addressed not just to those who like monks or nuns have taken vows to have no possessions but Christ, although they answer this call in a particularly literal way. No, Jesus says to all: You cannot serve God and mammon. No man can serve two masters. One has to be primary, and we are so made by God that the only one who can satisfy us, for whom we are made, who alone gives eternal life, is God himself, revealed to us in his Son Jesus Christ. So the second stage in a Christian's life

begins when he discovers Christ as a personal friend, the one who loves him with a divine love, who died for him, and who has risen from the dead to prepare for him a place with himself. We are all called to fall in love with this Jesus, to find him the richest treasure of the earth, to sacrifice all for him. Not that we don't love the things of earth, and in particular our own family, but rather that we love the giver of these things above the things themselves, and in loving him we find that we love everything else all the more deeply and genuinely because we love them as Christ does, with the love of God himself.

Christian life is always one of renunciation, a renunciation of false gods and their claim on us: the false gods of power, reputation, pleasure, possessions, all other kinds of attachments to creatures. We renounce the absolute claims they place on us, and in placing our treasure in Christ alone we find them again, we can enjoy them without that greedy possessiveness that can spoil all human loves. The invitation to the rich man is an invitation to step out and put our trust in the only treasure that will sustain us through death and into eternal life: the beauty and glory of the risen Lord Jesus. Hear what he himself says: give up worldly attachments and what do you get back: everything you gave up and a hundred times more, namely the treasure of divine love, the treasure that is his Sacred Heart burning with love for us and for all human beings.

The word of God is a sword penetrating between soul and spirit, capable of discerning reflections and thoughts of the heart. This means that Jesus can detach us from our false gods and attach us to himself. This is what he does through the Eucharist. We pray in the psalm, in which we asked for wisdom of heart, that God fill us at daybreak with his covenant love, that we may shout for joy and gladness all our days. Then we will be glad for the days when he afflicted us, that is, for the pain of our various renunciations. Let us put our roots in him, and with the life that comes from him may we freely open to all the world the treasures of the love we have been given.