



Father Dominic Lenk
Homily, Twenty-Eighth Ordinary Sunday
Year B, 2009
Saint Anselm Teen Mass

“ETERNITY, where shall I spend it?” This simple, short, yet loaded question appeared on a rather small, seemingly insignificant billboard. One that I had seen quite often as a child, and have not actually seen it until this afternoon.

This billboard stands by the highway in some farmer’s field just north of my hometown of Troy, and is probably either sponsored by one of the local churches or it is simply an expression of piety by that farmer. Yet, what I have always remembered most clearly about this sign was that question written on it. In fact, that question is the only thing that is on the sign. “Eternity, where shall I spend it?”

Now I don’t recall what I thought about that sign as a child, but as I think about it today I would like to think that my final answer to the question, “Eternity, where shall I spend it?”, would be, “heaven.” Then I started thinking about this sign in light of today’s Gospel about the rich young man.

It is easy to imagine that in the course of his teaching, Jesus would ask his followers to ask themselves this question, “Eternity, where shall you spend it?” And so, it would only be natural for this young man to ask in return, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?”

This is one of the more familiar stories from the Gospel of Mark. We have heard it so many times that I’m sure many of us could even tell it without looking at our Bibles. I’m also quite sure, that since this story is so familiar, we all have the same reaction: We feel sorry for that young man who goes away sad because of his many possessions. We feel sorry for him because we think that he has lost out on his chance for eternal life in heaven.

But did you ever wonder what happened to that young man after he left Jesus? Did you just assume that since he went away sad, you knew the end of the story? But it’s not the end of the story. It’s kind of like when a get invited to a class reunion. We start wondering, “Whatever happened to so-and-so who was voted most likely to succeed. Did they succeed?”

It was a similar reaction that I had when I was reading this Gospel passage for *lectio* one day. Sure, my first reaction was that the young man had blown it. That he had given up on his chance of eternal life in heaven. But then, something inside me said, “Hold on! That’s not the whole story about this rich young man.”

So I began to consider this young man. To imagine him as a real person and to wonder what might have happened to him after his encounter with Jesus. Here was someone who was living a good life, following all the rules. Obeying the Ten Commandments. But, he must also have been a bit obsessive/ compulsive since he asked Jesus if he was doing everything he was supposed to do. He reminds me of some of my students who ask me what they must do to get an “A+”.



SAINT LOUIS ABBEY



Yet, this man was not simply trying to pass a class. He was aiming toward eternal life. And when he heard what he had to do, he went away sad because of all his possessions.

Now imagine for a moment, this man has gone home after his encounter with Jesus. To say that he was sad may not be a strong enough word to describe what he was feeling. He may have even been angry. He may have even said something like this, “Who does that Jesus think he is? I’m following the commandments. That should be enough for God. I don’t need to sell anything to inherit eternal life.”

And even though he tried to put Jesus out of his mind and renew his commitment to following the Ten Commandments, I guarantee you one thing kept nagging at him. It was how Jesus looked at him. Mark describes it this way, “Jesus, looking at him, loved him.” Jesus not only looked at him — Jesus loved him!

Think about a time when someone looked at you and loved you. Can you find the words to describe that feeling? I know I can’t. But I do know that that feeling has stayed with me for a long time.

Now this young man was feeling the same way. Combine that feeling with Jesus’ words, “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,” and that young man had a lot to think about. This young man may have thought about it this way, “Sell everything? I can’t just sell everything. How am I supposed to make a living? But I can’t forget how he looked at me. No one’s ever looked at me with such intense love before. And what else did this Jesus say? ‘Follow me.’ He wants me, yes me, to be with him and to be one of his followers.”

The love which God has for each one of us is unconditional and enduring. It does not depend on manmade customs or rules. It is ever-present, ever-faithful. It is freely given. Do we freely accept this love and transform our lives to follow in the way of Christ?

Even though as a monk I claim not to own anything, the “things” which I do have are simply there for my use. Yet, there is a danger in this. For example, though I claim that I do not own the computer, the computer that I have for my use might own me. I have to admit that there are times when I walk past a computer I have this strong need to check my e-mail. Our lives are so technologically dependent that when the computer goes off-line we get frustrated because can’t get any work done. And let’s not get started about the constant need that some have to send text messages. Besides, has a computer or a cell phone ever looked at you with love?

This evening we are called to put our lives in perspective and to place our priorities in order. Though we claim, by virtue of our baptism, that we are followers of Jesus Christ, is Christ the first and foremost priority for our life?

Let us take time out of the busyness of our lives and ponder the questions, “Eternity, where shall I spend it?” and “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” Yet before we come up with our final answer, we should remember that from the moment of our creation in the mind of God and throughout every moment of our life, Jesus has looked on us and loved us.