

28th Sunday in Ordinary Time

If you squirm in your seat when you hear Jesus tell us today what it takes to inherit eternal life, you are not alone. I squirm, too. It is not enough, it seems, to keep all the commandments; as if we could even do that well. But no, even if we were to keep all the commandments, follow all the rules, never miss Mass—as Jesus said to the young man, it is still not enough because one thing is lacking: “Go sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.”

What are we supposed to do with that?! If you’re not St. Francis of Assisi or St. Clare, who both did just that, your sympathies might lie with the young man who goes away grieving and sad. You might have a lot in life, you might not—but if we are better off than impoverished refugees, people trapped in war—we can’t help but imagine Jesus looking right at us, and then, maybe, squirm in our seats. Okay, sure, we can donate something now and then, help out, we aren’t heartless. But what Jesus asks of the young man today is just too much.

And you might be tempted to just think to yourself: “Well, that’s not going to happen,” and just dismiss the whole thing. Maybe we’ll get a nicer Gospel reading next week. We can be tempted to do that because it’s all so unreasonable, and even impossible.

But to do that is to miss a very important message in this Mass that needs to be heard. That message is that Jesus agrees with us: it is impossible for us. So impossible that it is as ludicrous as a camel going through the eye of a needle. The disciples themselves despair: Who can be saved? Who can keep all the rules, and sacrifice themselves so totally for others?

And Jesus gives them the answer. What is not possible for people **is** possible for God. It **is** possible for Jesus. It is Jesus himself, who is God, who will follow all the rules, do the Father’s will. And it is Jesus himself, who is God, who will sacrifice himself so totally— giving everything he has, even his life.

In doing this He opens the floodgate of grace for you and for me. It makes our salvation possible. That is why the opening prayer of this Mass declares that God’s grace, at all times, goes before us, and follows after us. What

Jesus did accomplish what is not possible, and enables us, the prayer says, to carry out good works.

The good news of this Mass is that we do not have to go away grieving like the young man. We don't have to tune out the message either. We can embrace the gift of God's grace that says, of course, we could never earn our salvation on our own. As if we could on our own follow the rules, do all the right things, and then somehow God would owe us. The Church defined that as a heresy centuries ago.

Far from it. Our yearning for God is **grace**, what we do for God as our response to him is **grace**, and whatever we do in cooperation with God bears fruit because of **grace**.

Our good works have merit, but it is God's grace that saves us, and enables those good works in the first place.

That is why in 1999, *The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification by the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church* was issued resolving a bitter misunderstanding between Catholics and Protestants.

The declaration proclaimed the truth of the Church that:

Together we confess: By grace alone, in faith in Christ's saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping for and calling us to good works.

And then it proclaimed:

We confess together that good works – a Christian life lived in faith, hope and love – follow justification and are its fruits.

Christ has won us that grace. He gives it to us in our baptism, and we drink deeply of it in the sacraments. That is why we are here. That is why we will approach the altar to receive that grace in the body and blood of Christ. And that is why the prayer after Communion will declare that God nourishes us so that we might become sharers of his divine nature, divine life; that we might inherit eternal life after all—and not have to go away grieving.

We go away, not grieving, but rejoicing, in the words of the psalmist, for what God has done for us, and for what he has invited us to: Fill us with your love, O Lord that we may rejoice and be glad. Amen!

- Fr. David M. Chiantella