October 11, 2015
28th Sunday in Ordinary Time – “Make Every Day Your ‘Best Day Ever’ as a Disciple of Christ”
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Reading 1: Wisdom 7:7-11
I prayed, and prudence was given me; I pleaded, and the spirit of wisdom came to me. I preferred her to scepter and throne, and deemed riches nothing in comparison with her, nor did I liken any priceless gem to her; because all gold, in view of her, is a little sand, and before her, silver is to be accounted mire. Beyond health and comeliness I loved her, and I chose to have her rather than the light, because the splendor of her never yields to sleep. Yet all good things together came to me in her company, and countless riches at her hands.

Reading 2: Hebrews 4:12-13
Brothers and sisters: Indeed the word of God is living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating even between soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and able to discern reflections and thoughts of the heart. No creature is concealed from him, but everything is naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must render an account.

Gospel: Mark 10: 17-30
As Jesus was setting out on a journey, a man ran up, knelt down before him, and asked him, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus answered him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. 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.” He replied and said to him, “Teacher, all of these I have observed from my youth.” Jesus, looking at him, loved him and 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.” At that statement his face fell, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions.

Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” The disciples were amazed at his words. So Jesus again said to them in reply, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” They were exceedingly astonished and said among themselves, “Then who can be saved?” Jesus looked at them and said, “For human beings it is impossible, but not for God. All things are possible for God.” // Peter began to say to him, “We have given up everything and followed you.” Jesus said, “Amen, I say to you, there is no one who has given up house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands for my sake and for the sake of the gospel who will not receive a hundred times more now in this present age: houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and eternal life in the age to come.”

HOMILY
A few weeks ago, my wife and I visited our 3 young grandchildren in the Albany area and played babysitters for a few days while their Mom and Dad traveled for work. On the final day we were there, the 5 year-old and 7 year-old had a school holiday, so we told them that morning that we had a special treat for them that day, that we were going to take them to the town park to play, the park that had all of the slides, swings, forts, sandboxes, you-name-it-and-it-had-it kinds of things a playground would have. The 5 year-old burst into tears and yelled, “Worst day ever,” and scooted off, while the other two grandchildren ran around happy because they thoroughly enjoyed going to that park. When we found out that the park did NOT have an area where the 5 year-old could ride her new
bike … her brand new bike, by the way … we realized her sudden mood change, and we changed our plan for the day to also include a trip to the ice cream store and a few other different adventures. Well, we did go to the park, and she did have a great time there, even without the bike, and when it was time for us to leave later that day, after the ice cream and other adventures, she gave us a big hug and said, “Best day ever.”

Hmmm – best day ever, worst day ever – can’t say that reminds us of a certain football team’s progress so far this year, can we.

So, I didn’t relate that story to comment on the mood swings of a 5 year-old, and I certainly didn’t mention it to talk about our successful babysitting escapades – I won’t go into some of the other experiences we’ve had – but today’s Gospel reading from Mark brought those particular phrases to mind in some ways. Here is this fellow, evidently someone who owned large estates, which the word possessions alluded to, a fellow who said he was following the Jewish law because he was NOT doing those things he wasn’t to do – he wasn’t killing, stealing, lying, and other commandments that Jesus mentioned to him. He was a fellow who was evidently secure and comfortable in his lifestyle because of his wealth. Maybe he was very secure and comfortable in his lifestyle, and maybe he didn’t want it to end – we don’t know why he was asking about eternal life. But, we do know that up until that point in time in Jewish history, there was no real idea of an afterlife per se in Jewish thinking. The idea of an eternal life, a meaningful life after death of some sort, was just beginning to take shape in Jewish thinking and in Jewish writings. So this fellow goes up to Jesus and poses an honest question, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” The question was on the right track – evidently, he was paying attention to Jesus’ teachings that it was a gift from God, that one couldn’t earn it, but receive it. He may have been thinking, in today’s terminology, that this was going to be his “best day ever,” as he’ll find out more about this eternal life and how he could receive it. In a few short minutes, however, we hear that, “His face fell and he went away sad.” This day may have turned into his “worst day ever.” It took our grand-daughter a few hours to go from worst day to best day, but only a few minutes for the rich fellow to go from best day to worst day.

In those few minutes, Jesus told the fellow that he was lacking in one thing – in essence, He was asking that fellow a question that He asks each of us, today. Jesus didn’t so much ask him to do something, but asked him to become someone – to become His disciple. And Jesus told him what he had to do to become His disciple – go … sell … give … come … follow. Now, we don’t know why Jesus asked this fellow to give all his wealth away, yet we know that some of the other disciples kept some or all of theirs. Peter, for example, kept his fishing boat. Evidently, the fellow’s wealth was standing in the way of his being a disciple of Jesus. Now, many Jews believed that God favored the wealthy, that an individual’s wealth and success were a measure of God’s favor on the person, determined by how well the person kept the Mosaic Law. So, Jesus was asking the fellow to be counter-cultural, to give up his status, to think of others, others who were poor and suffering, others who weren’t comfortable and secure like he was. Jesus was asking the fellow to place his trust in God, by giving his wealth to the poor and following Him, and then he could enjoy the same relationship with Jesus that others had, the same relationship that would lead to eternal life, the same relationship that would make that day his “best day ever.”

Certainly, Jesus placed a great focus on the poor, the marginalized, the suffering. We were definitely reminded of that during Pope Francis’ recent trip to Cuba and the U.S. – what a media sensation he became! I heard someone comment that during his trip, the news coverage seemed to be heavily focused on him and what he did and said, essentially putting into the background whatever else was happening in the rest of the world, both good and bad. The media were constantly quoting both
Catholics and non-Catholics alike about his worldly concern for the poor, the marginalized and the suffering. Some saw him following in the footsteps of his saintly namesake. Others commented on his stance to speak out on what bothered him. He had a certain appeal to bring others to the fold, or return others back under the fold, or even to get us to think again on certain views that might be considered counter-cultural, in some ways.

What if we asked Jesus, today, where we could be better disciples of His, what areas we could improve upon in our lives to be better Christians? Following the example of Pope Francis, how could we increase our focus on the poor, the marginalized and the suffering, and how could we help to bump up the focus now given at the personal, parish and diocesan levels in our church, as well as the local, state and national levels in our government? Consider the following: last Sunday, Bishop Matano presided at a Mass at the Cathedral, along with several other priests, to commemorate Respect Life Sunday together with the annual White Mass for medical professionals. In his homily, he stressed the importance of keeping God in our society – the more God is removed, the more violent society has become. Also, the other evening, a very ecumenical group of a few hundred people honored Bob and Marie Pieters – they founded Heritage Christian Services, which now runs several dozen homes in Western New York, helping almost 2000 developmentally disabled children and adults. You may have a home right up the street from you. They told of the many challenges they had to overcome to make this happen, including an early attempt to remove Christian from their name.

How can we be better disciples? Christ is asking each of us to get further and more deeply involved, as His disciples. I’m sure you can provide a list for yourself, maybe even help someone close to you with theirs. Need help? Ask Jesus – I encourage you to do that anyway, and then come ... follow, and then make that day and every day after that your “best day ever,” as disciples of Christ.