

28<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, B – October 10, 2021 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.  
Cathedral of St. Paul, Birmingham – 5pm Sat. Vigil; 7:15 & 11am Sunday Masses – 700 words

Last Sunday’s scriptural lessons gave us much to think about concerning marriage, but this Sunday the readings – especially the gospel – invite us to pivot toward the consideration of the consecrated life. The rich young man understands the commandments that all human beings, without exception, are bound by and is loved by Christ for keeping them. But Jesus also surprises him with an “optional extra”: “If you wish to be perfect”, he adds... then he invites him to follow him in poverty. We call this “evangelical poverty” – to be like Christ in the world.

The “evangelical counsels”, as we traditionally call them, are poverty, chastity, and obedience. We see them perfectly reflected in the life of Christ, and we see that some are indeed invited by him to renounce the ordinary course of life in this world to live in a more radical way for him, as a living sign and witness for others. This divine calling to some people is always an appeal to their freedom, and in that regard, it is interesting how the young man went away sad. We get the impression that he may well have rejected the invitation.

If that was the case, the young man would have had the possibility of salvation, for he was striving to keep the moral law. But he would have missed a graced opportunity to be more fully conformed to Christ in a way that was life-giving for the world. Moreover, though his salvation was still possible, it may well have become even more difficult. For the Lord immediately adds: “How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the Kingdom...!” It seems that he was offering the young man a way that – for him at least – was more secure.

And this, I think, is one of the keys to understanding vocation, divine calling: namely, that we are free in the matter. We may choose it, or we may choose something else. If we live and die in the state of grace, which implies living a moral life according to the commandments, we can be saved either way. But when the Lord calls someone, he looks at him and loves him, as he did with the rich young man. Knowing the person through and through, Christ sees that this way would be better than all the others for this particular person.

Which is not to say that the way will be easy. One of the misconceptions that many seem to have today is that it would be easier to get married than to become a priest or religious. But there is no state in life that is easy, for the Lord calls all, without exception, to pass by the way of the cross. If he gives you a special invitation – a vocation – to follow him in the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience, it is because he sees an opportunity, possible only with the help of his grace, for an outcome of greater glory for both you and him.

We should, therefore, not be afraid of vocation. The first reading spoke of prudence, which, as the Catechism says, “...is the virtue that disposes [us] to discern our true good in every circumstance and to choose the right means of achieving it”.<sup>1</sup> Prudence will always help a young man or woman who perceives a possible vocation – an invitation from the Lord – to know how best respond and so avoid going away sad. We should all pray for prudence for ourselves, for our children, for our families, for each other – so that we may all use our freedom well.

Yes, the Lord knows us through and through – “no creature is concealed from him”, as the second reading reminded. And he loves us. He looks upon each one of us with that knowledge and love, and, beyond seeing our current state, looks to our potential, too. He always sees the best way that we can come to heavenly glory; for some, it is by means of the way of perfection of the evangelical counsels, and he invites them accordingly. He still calls today – let us pray that all who are called will have the prudence to say a generous “yes”.

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<sup>1</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1806.