

28th Sun OT - Mark 10:17-30

"(The man's) face fell, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions."

"...For he had many possessions," or we could say, his possessions had possessed him. We all have many possessions, but when our possessions begin to possess us, then we are in trouble and may not even know it.

This is the root of today's gospel message. Jesus puts it more clearly and distinctly, after the man's response, "How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" I love Peter's response, "Then who can be saved?" Jesus emphasizes that God saves and adds that "...all things are possible for God!"

Sr. Melannie, writes in today's reflection, "Today is a good day to take stock of ***the company*** we keep. Begin with people. Who shares with us their love and wisdom? Who nourishes our faith, our hope? What things have we chosen to keep us company: our home, our parish, our workplace? What other kinds of company hang around our house: favorite photographs, a worn Bible, good books, African violets, a cherished pet, a backyard bird feeder, a recycling bin? How do we keep company with those in need: awareness, prayer, financial support, volunteering, advocacy? What are we giving up or giving away to keep company with Jesus?"

The ***backyard bird feeder*** caught my attention, since I want to use it as an example to move forward, when we feel the Lord is calling us to a deeper relationship. After the homily a young man will come forward to be confirmed. I had to receive faculties to administer this sacrament from the Archbishop, and I had good reason to do so. I do not want to put this young man on the spot, but today's gospel does coincide with his request compared the man in today's gospel, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus tells him to keep the commandments. The man was probably wondering what more he must do, and Jesus answered for him.

This brings us back to our backyard bird feeder, which is part of a bigger picture which I'll call ***the Spirituality of Bird Watching, and Bird Listening***. Most people at one time or another have the experience of a Bird Feeder or Bird Bath in their backyard. I'll compare this to the Sunday Catholic, since most people I know are Sunday Catholics or Sunday Christians, where the rest of the week at least say our prayers before meals. It's like having a bird-feeder or bird-bath in your backyard, our token immersion in birds. Having these we

think we are contributing to our feathered friends, but we may be inadvertently exposing them to danger, like winter starvation because they have become accustomed to our feeder or are easy prey to our cats or sparrow hawks or even disease.

Rarely do we go much beyond that in knowing our feathered friends. The same is for our religion. After a Catholic or Christian education, we pretty much steer clear of religion, unless we slowly become immersed in the Scriptures through friends or through a good spiritual book that start the long journey to a deeper commitment to the spiritual life.

A simple gift of binoculars from my youngest sister started me off on the path to bird watching, where I moved out from my controlled bird environment with my bird feeder and bath and entered into the fascinating world of birds at the many nature parks and reserves around our cities.

Notice how with good books and plenty of help from experts we can ourselves become amateur scripture scholars, theologians, and church historians. All the above and more opens up for us a whole new world where we can enter with confidence, over time. And there is a parallel between the two since both take study and reading, both take silence during the actual prayer and bird watching. This process can apply to other hobbies and discipline besides bird watching and listening. But with bird watching and listening we have to move out of our own environment and into another, with silence and just observing with eventually sense of contemplation.

Eventually we have to become like a bird. And yet, that is the same destination we hope to accomplish through our spirituality of divinization, as the Orthodox would call it. We become like God through God's attributes of inner goodness, beauty, love. At some point we allow ourselves to become possessed by God rather than by our possessions. There is no way we can walk away sad when that happens. However, anything other than God will leave us restless, unsettled, and never fully happy.

And yet this is our goal. I think it is St. Ignatius who that said it doesn't matter if a bird is tethered by a string or a chain, since the bird still is not free. It doesn't matter that we are surrounded by all sorts of things or possessions, as long as they don't tether from being free to fly to God.