

TWENTY-EIGHTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME: October 13, 2024

The gospel today tells us about a man who, as it says later in the gospel, had many possessions. He was well-to-do. In Saint Mathew's version of this story, we learn this was a young man. It sounds as if he was a religious man, adhering to the commandments and conscious of his own standing before his God. He is unnamed. He could be any one of us. He seeks Jesus, about whom he must have heard a lot, and kneels before him. He is sincere in asking Jesus to aid him in attaining eternal life. We would like to know what is missing in his life since he is on the rich side. Why isn't he more content? I may be reading something into this story but I think he wanted to find some deeper meaning to his life other than what he could buy. Could it be that he wanted to know what was the real purpose of his life? Jesus replies with an answer that certainly would have given him meaning. "Sell what you own; go and give the money to the poor... then come follow me."

I guess I am focusing on the need for meaning since that is such a sign of our own times and seems to be a major issue among young people. I sense that our western culture has lost its roots and its values and depends on corporations and consumer messages to give us our values. We are a people adrift and easily follow someone who offers us some meaning. But most of the meaning in the west is about one's possessions or one's power, pleasure or prestige. It is principally external while meaning has something to do with wisdom, a matter of the heart. Our multitudinous technical devices such as computers and i-phones give us facts but not meaning and we are beguiled by them.

For me meaning depends on being true to who we are as human beings. A central aspect of being human is how we relate for we cannot go it alone. Individualism has taken over our culture and we starve for meaning. I believe Christianity, as well as the perennial philosophy found in most religious traditions, expresses our need for relationships by balancing four aspects of life. Let me bore you with a review of these four fields of relationship – they are fellow human beings, all creation, God, and one's self. I believe all four fields must be in balance and harmony if we are to live lives that have real meaning.

In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Christ taught us that every human person is our neighbor. Mister Rogers knew that as well. Our families, community, native country may be priorities for our concern but respect and acceptance of all people is the way to live the unity of all humankind and not make divisions. We

may disagree but we must listen, learn, and not be afraid of those who are different.

Secondly we relate to all of creation. Every part of creation, animal, plant, rock, is our relation. We have misused and abused nature and are paying the consequences. Seeking our relation to all creation is the therapy we need to be truly human.

Not in order of importance, the third relationship is the most fundamental. I am not the center of the world; there is something, someone beyond me, someone that transcends me. I don't have to carry the weight of the world, and even my own life, on my own shoulders. We acknowledge a great mystery which we call God and Christ tells us this mystery is love itself. What a relief it is to surrender my own life and problems to this Spirit-creator who gives me breath at every moment.

My final relationship in this quaternary is myself. This is not a self-centered care for myself in neglect of the other three. But it is the hard work of a life-time to find my true self. If I turn off all the distractions of the culture, I may face who I really am, find the self-knowledge that is a lifetime's discovery, find peace in self-acceptance and the self-confidence to relate to all that is.

This four-fold search is the path to wisdom. The first reading tells us that wisdom is to be preferred to scepters and thrones, wealth is nothing compared to her; she is more than health and beauty, more than light itself. The reading concludes with the line, "All good things came to me along with her, and in her hands uncounted wealth."

So many people are starving for meaning in their lives. Young people in particular often have no reference points, no traditional values and traditions to set them on their journey of life. They are bombarded with false values, easy solutions, external practices that do not reach their soul. For various reasons, some very justified, they have turned their backs on religion and churches but, unknowingly, are brain-washed by consumerism and advertising. I do not know any easy way to get past all this. But this I know, that we elders must practice more deeply our own values and balance the four relational fields in our lives without ever condemning others who have not found them. We ourselves are called to find wisdom and show the joy of having meaning in how we live.

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