

ROMAN CATHOLIC

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In chapter 19 of Matthew's gospel, Jesus meets a rich young man who asks one of the ultimate questions: "What good must I do to gain eternal life?" Jesus responds, as the man knows the teacher would: "Keep the commandments!" The rich man says that he has done that, so now what is necessary? In a word, Jesus says, let go of your life then, give whatever you have for others. And, as the story goes, the man has a difficult time hearing and living what Jesus says.

In the teaching and life of Jesus, giving one's life is at the core of His ministry. Jesus shows us the way. In His teaching, Jesus speaks of "the grain of wheat that must fall to the earth" and, He says, "there is no greater love than to give one's life for another." He makes it clear in the story of the rich man, that anyone who hears Him and would follow, must be willing to give his/her life.

The word of Jesus is not easily heard in this world which invites us to seek more for ourselves, to gather, get all we can, hold on to "what is ours." But as we listen to the gospel today, again from Matthew, we are reminded that each of us is given not only life, but also a variety of gifts and talents. The point of the story is obvious: holding onto or burying is not the object of the gift received. It is to be cherished, Yes, but also multiplied, and then give as it was given, to another.

Over and over again, we listen to these lessons of Jesus and ask ourselves what they mean in our faith life. How are we to live? Jesus says, "Let go as you receive, for in the end you will let go of all that seemed so important." There are those in our community who really do give their lives (our martyrs); some give their possessions (as we spring clean, etc); and some a variety of moneys (to charities and other organizations).

In this fall season, when the earth also teaches us to let go, we celebrate "National Donor Sabbath"- a weekend during which we reflect on the very gift of our bodies (our organs and tissues) which serve us so well. How willing are we to hear the Lord's word to our lives in this context: Not even our bodies' can we take with us in death, though we believe in a resurrection at the end of time. Perhaps, part of the resurrection is in the rebirth we give in the donation of our organs and tissues.

It is still difficult for many of us to talk about organ and tissue donation, even though it seems so much at the heart of what we believe. And, it was clearly the style of Jesus not to hold on to but to give freely of His life. Am I willing to lay down my life for you, even though you may be a stranger? To give my very body that other persons may have the life I am so blessed with?

Next weekend, we come to the end of our church year and it is always a good time to take stock of the important things in life and to reflect on the ultimate questions. What is life about? Where is the meaning to be found? And to ask the question of the rich young man in different words: What can I do to give life? In the end, will I give my possessions, my money to those in need? And will I have considered and made clear to those I love that I will give my body and whatever can be shared so even one other person might see, walk, and live as I have?

Paul reminds us today in his letter to the Thessalonians that the day of the Lord comes like a thief in the night. As we end this church year, may we be in touch with those things that matter now and in the end. The gospel for next weekend continues from our gospel today with the very familiar words of "final judgment": "When I was hungry, you gave me food..." May we remember that there are others who would have life were I willing one day to lay down my life: to share my eyes, my bones, my skin, and my life!

What good must I do to gain eternal life? Give life!