

## BEING LIBERATED FROM WEALTH

My dear sisters and brothers, we have walked through this week hand-in-hand with the Lord. He has shown us the way; he has walked along with us. The Lord loves us and invites us to the Eucharist. Let us pray that we might open our lives to God's word as we listen to the scriptures and be nourished by the Eucharist.

Let us submit ourselves to the Lord, because the Lord is here to set us free, so that we might live in freedom, with others and for others.

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My dear sisters and brothers, in today's gospel we find this very special encounter between Jesus and the rich young man. It is not just one of the usual meetings with Jesus, but it has some characteristics that make it quite different. There are many aspects that indicate a very special relationship between Jesus and this stranger. The first thing we notice is that he is a young man, he is rich, and so he is coming to Jesus not with a problem or sickness or any particular need. We see that he has everything necessary to make him happy and for his wellbeing. He is at the prime of his life: he is youthful; he has energy; he is rich; he has resources – and he comes to Jesus. We also notice that in many other cases, Jesus goes out to people and calls them by his own initiative. For instance, he sees Matthew sitting at the tax collector's desk and calls him. He sees fishermen and calls them. It is the initiative of Jesus. But in this case, the encounter is the initiative of the rich young man. The gospel says he ran up to Jesus. He takes the initiative: he comes to Jesus, which means that his intentions and his motives were sincere and genuine. He comes to Jesus, not with a need, but in order that he might do a little more for God. He doesn't come at an old age, seeking eternal life; he comes at a time when he should be engaged in the affairs of the world. He comes searching for an answer from Jesus, and that shows a very positive motivation in him.

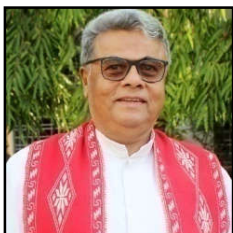
In this encounter, we see that the two of them seem to love each other. The young man values Jesus and says to him: 'Good teacher, good master'. He has a positive experience of Jesus even before he has met and interacted with him. He comes to this 'good master' to seek something meaningful in his life. On the other hand, we see Jesus also has something very positive towards this rich young man. There is something reciprocal. The gospel says: Jesus looked at him and loved him. It was a look, not of condemnation, but of love. And it is his love with which Jesus makes a demand. The rich young man is not just a person with good intentions but also lives a good, practical life. He tells Jesus, when Jesus enumerates the commandments, 'I have been living all this, not for a week but from my earliest years', maybe from his childhood. This means he has consistently been good, and in that goodness, he comes to Jesus, seeking something more – the path to eternal life. And Jesus, observing his goodness, this very fertile soil in the heart of this rich young man, offers him a challenge: 'Young man, give up everything. Go and sell everything, give the money to the poor, and come and follow me'. The rich young man is confronted by a very strong demand – to give up everything that was giving him joy and meaning in life. When Jesus sees his hesitation, he looked around and tells the people that if we are rich, we will find it almost impossible to enter the kingdom of heaven. Jesus is addressing not just the rich young man whom he loved, but all people assembled there. And the people also say to Jesus, 'If this is what you demand, then it is impossible to inherit the Kingdom of God'. And Jesus replies, 'Yes, with man, with human strength, it is impossible, but not with God, for with God, all things are possible'.

What is this ‘all things’? What can God do for us that we cannot do for ourselves? When we look at the gospel, how do we apply it to ourselves? How do we apply it to a person in the world? It is certainly not practical for all of us to just sell everything and follow Jesus. Let’s say the father of a family: can he, in order to follow Jesus, to inherit the Kingdom of God, say, ‘I’m going to give up all my money. I’m going to give up all my wealth. I am going to give it all to the poor and follow Jesus’? What about his wife, his family, his children? He is the breadwinner. How can he make such an impractical decision in his life? He needs to be in the home and bring up his family. Dear sisters and brothers, Jesus is not asking for that. The core message of Jesus is to set us free from our material possessions. He releases us from our enslavement to wealth and liberates us so that we can live peacefully and in freedom.

I’d like to share with you a little example – it’s a small incident that took place just last week. You must have all noticed outside the church compound there is an elderly woman, all bent, all frail. I often stop and talk to her and call her *maushi* (aunty), and she is very happy to interact. So the other day, she came to the church in an autorickshaw. When she arrived here, she was opening her little pouch of money to pay the autorickshaw driver. And the driver looked at her—old, sickly, frail—and he said to her, ‘How can I take your money?’, and he refused to take it. There were some people around who witnessed this little interaction between them. This autorickshaw driver had just begun his day. He was earning his living, not big amounts, but just enough to keep him and his family going for the day. And yet he refused to accept money from this poor, frail woman. Dear sisters and brothers, it reveals to us that this man who is earning a living, who needs this money, is not enslaved by it. We see in this little gesture his freedom, not just to have but also to give where there is a need. He is liberated, in a certain sense, from his money. He has just begun the day, and usually the first money they earn is the *bohni* (good luck) for the day, and so it was important money for him. And yet he says, ‘I will not take this money from you’. That simple rickshaw driver, in his simple gesture, is telling all of us that while we need money, we earn money, we have money, we need not be enslaved by it; we can be liberated from it.

We have seen many beautiful relationships, many marriages, break up because of money matters – because the couple is not able to manage their money in freedom, to share, to give to each other or for certain needs. There is an obsession with money and it destroys a marital relationship. That is why in marriage preparation courses today, there are talks on how a married couple must deal with their money matters. The same within a family: if all siblings are fighting over property and none of them is a liberated person, none of them is willing to compromise, everyone fights for his or her rights and the conflict goes on endlessly. The family is caught up in a problem because they have the money but they are not free and liberated from it.

My dear sisters and brothers, even with ourselves individually, if we are obsessed with material things, with wealth, then we are enslaved by it. What is the impossible task that Jesus can do for us? He can take away our enslavement, our obsession with material things. Let us pray that each one of us, as we participate in the Eucharist, may also submit our lives to the Lord Jesus, to allow him to release us from any form of enslavement and obsession. The Lord is giving us a message this morning: that while we need wealth and money for our daily living, we can also be liberated from it. We use it but we are not enslaved by it. This is the impossible thing that Jesus offers each one of us – to liberate us, to make us free from our obsession with wealth and material things, so that we become generous and happy in our living, Amen.



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