

Mk 10:22 "Sell all you have: and come, follow me." The one who is always leaving the material, seems always to have more than they need. The one who clutches to things of this earth never seems to have enough.

Our reading today reminds me of a wonderful illustration: To catch a monkey, you can cut a hole of about an inch in diameter in a butternut, and then hollow out the interior of the butternut. Let it dry out, tie it to a tree, and then put some peanuts in the calabash. The monkey grasps the peanuts and thus cannot withdraw his clenched paw through the hole. As you approach, the monkey will screech blue murder, and although it will not release the peanuts, it could do so at any moment and so be free. We all have peanuts we cling on to – whether the peanuts of loving the limelight, workaholism, material goods, or something else.

The gospel reading today is about a person who could not release his peanuts to receive eternal life. A wealthy man came – or ran up – to see Jesus, and in Mark's version, he was evidently middle aged. He threw himself at Jesus' feet, and sought reassurance that he was acceptable to God.

Though well off materially and well behaved in terms of religion, yet he seemed to sense that something very important was missing in his life. He hoped that "his best effort would turn out for the best." He had never killed, committed adultery, stolen, or lied; he had taken good care of his parents; and he had not underpaid his workers. If he felt uneasy, perhaps we should as well!

Despite his decency, Jesus (loving him) told him that he had to leave everything and follow Jesus. That particular man would only come to terms with what it meant for him to follow Jesus by leaving everything. He felt unable to cope with this. He could not release his peanuts, and so felt the only honest thing to do, and left: one of the only people called by Jesus in the Gospels who walked away. He did not try to pretend. One bishop said that the last thing to be converted in a person is their pocket! When God says, "Tithe", and share generously with those in need, we say, not really. You are asking too much. We want our peanuts.

But Jesus had more to say, even after his departure. He said that it is very hard for a wealthy person to enter the kingdom. The (disciples?), used to the idea that success is a sign of God's blessing, were completely amazed.

Despite their surprise, not only did Jesus repeat this *saying*, but also he went on to say that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than it is for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God. The qualification Jesus gave for entry into the sovereignty of God were simply impossible. The way in was only by the possibility of God. The point is not that only an ascetic or a saint can enter the kingdom, but that *all that we can do*, even if we are an ascetic or a saint or rich and influential, is never going to be sufficient qualification.

According to this Gospel reading, to inherit eternal life, one's earthly life must center on Jesus, on the fullness of God present with us – not the law, not material possessions, or anything else. He always works his wonders in us only from the point that we realize our insufficiency for God and for one another.

In response to Peter's defense that Jesus disciples *have* left material possessions, Jesus said that when you follow me, you are always leaving the things of the world, and receiving the riches relationships within the community of faith. The best things in life are relational. What we begin in our baptism must be the case every day: dying to self-sufficiency, and living in God's possibilities. Each of us has something to share generously. When we do so, *now in this time (kairos)*, we always have more than we need. For the English phrase "in this time", the text has the Greek word "kairos" which means critical decision time; not the alternative word "chronos", which means calendar time. So Jesus emphasized that our earthly time is not so much a *narrative biography (chronos)*, but rather, an earthly *decision event* which reflects the nature of our eternal soul and being. Our choices, every day, and therefore in the decision event of our whole life, accumulate either in turning to the rich and satisfying possibilities in Jesus and his community; or else in always holding on to our peanuts, whatever they are, and so never having enough.