

## Contexts

### Mark's Gospel

- Composed between 65-70 CE
- Generally accepted as the first Gospel written.
- Authorship is unclear but possibly written by John Mark, the companion of Peter in Rome.
- Begins with the ministry of John the Baptist in the wilderness, then the Baptism of Jesus, then Jesus battling the forces of evil in the wilderness.
- First action of Jesus is to establish a community to establish the kingdom of God.
- Major work of this community is the work of healing and restoring God's right order, as opposed to the order of Rome, or the order established by the scribes and Pharisees, or religious and cultural norms of the time.
- Cleansing & healing stories restore people to their proper (rightful) place in the Kingdom and in human society (no longer outcasts, despised, unclean, etc).
- The right order of God's kingdom shatters and goes beyond the human and religious limitations placed on some of God's beloved sons and daughters.
- There is a characteristic starkness in Mark's Gospel – it is the shortest of the 4 canonical Gospels.
- Often the story is told by contrast – who is truly blind: the blind beggar or the seeing disciples, etc.

### Mark 10:17-27 (short version) – things to notice

- Follows immediately from last Sunday's Gospel reading (Jesus' teaching about marriage & blessing of children)
- An impromptu meeting between Jesus and the rich man.
- The attitude of the man – 'ran up to Jesus' – eager, calls Jesus 'good' – is not there to test or disconcert – sincere – is disconcerted by Jesus' challenge
- Man's question is about inheriting eternal life
- The attitude of Jesus – gentle dialogue – looks steadily at the man and loves him – presents a challenge
- Man goes away sad because he has great wealth
- But who really has the wealth – the rich man or the poor Jesus?
- Disciples are astonished by Jesus' teaching about wealth – assumption that wealthy are especially close to God
- Nothing is impossible for God – God redeems and admits to eternal life irrespective of wealth

### The Liturgical Context

The first reading from the Book of Wisdom sets the scene for the Gospel. It is a reflection comparing Wisdom to earthly riches. Wisdom is about being able to discern and judge according to the mind and heart of God. Wisdom sees deeply – it is not distracted by power, wealth and status, but searches for the meaning and importance of life for a person of faith.

### Reflection

The first reading this weekend suggests that Wisdom is more highly valued by the people of God than silver, gold, health and beauty.

The Wisdom of God in the person of Jesus challenges the notion that riches are a sign of divine favour - a popular notion in his day which explains the astonishment of the disciples.

In the Jewish tradition, wealth was seen as a blessing from God and the wealthy person as especially favoured by God. Along with the idea of divine blessing and favour came a divine obligation (often ignored) – the care of God’s poor.

As the conversation between the rich man and Jesus unfolds, we see that he a good and upright man. The commandments which Jesus spells out are those to do with one’s treatment of others. These, the rich man says, he has always kept.

Jesus’ love and affection for the man recognises his very genuine efforts to live according to the commandments. This love ushers in the call to discipleship, ‘There is one thing you lack. Go and sell everything you own and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.’ Jesus wants this man to be a follower of his. He is inviting him to move from a way of life centred on the Torah (Jewish law) to a way of life centred totally on Jesus.

When the man first approaches Jesus he asks what more he must do to inherit eternal life while still maintaining the present direction of his life. What Jesus is inviting him into is the total transformation of his life. Jesus is inviting him to an even more radical fulfillment of his obligations to neighbour by selling all he has, giving the proceeds to the poor, and then becoming a follower of Jesus.

Rather sadly, the rich man cannot take this step. He is trapped and controlled by his possessions and cannot let them go in order to enter into joyful and life-giving companionship with Jesus.

When Jesus talks about how hard it is for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God the disciples are astounded. They, too, think of wealth and possessions as a sign of God’s favour and blessing. Jesus drives home his point by insisting that, ‘It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.’ The disciples are even more astounded and conclude that if rich people can’t make it into the kingdom, then what hope do the rest of us have?

Jesus’ reply to the disciples tells us clearly that if we rely on human resources and means it is impossible to find salvation. But if we rely on God, then we can be saved - the good and gracious God who gives the Kingdom as pure, unmerited gift.

Sometimes, the very things we love, in which we find our security and in which we place our trust can turn out to be our undoing and stumbling blocks on our journey into the kingdom.

Jesus’ reply about God who can do the impossible is also a reassurance that God stand ready to journey with us, to help us find the way to move our hearts from reliance on ourselves and human resources to rely on God’s love and companionship.