

Inherit Eternal Life Eighth Week in Ordinary Time Monday, March 4, 2019 **Sir 17:20-24; Mk 10:17-27** (St. Casimir) (So this idea of value, in what one values, and what one holds onto, what one lets go of becomes very essential in this reading.)

“Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

Actually what is astonishing is the question itself, because the tradition that Jesus and this young man came from had no official view at all that there was such a thing as eternal life for people. **Eternal life meant the life of God, but for people it didn't exist, in the writings anyway.** So that's the meaning of the first reading from Sirach. “No more can the dead give praise than those who have never lived.” There is no separation here between good and evil or anything like that; it's the dead are dead. “Who in the netherworld can glorify the Most High in place of the living who offer their praise?” **So there was a netherworld; it was under the earth, but it was a place of sleep.** Basically people were asleep down there. But we see from the **gospel** that already at this time there were Jewish people thinking about **this possibility of something more than just sleeping in the pit of the earth**, which was called Sheol. And this is what the question is about. And the interesting thing is **this rich young man acknowledged Jesus as someone who would know the answer to this.**

Now the answer, first of all, turns out to be rather, if I dare say, humdrum, just a matter of being good. Now that in itself should be shocking for many Evangelical people that claim being good is irrelevant; it's all about believing. Well not here. **Notice how often faith is not even mentioned when the issue of eternal life is brought up in Scripture**, whether it's Matthew 25 separating sheep from goats, which has nothing to do with faith, or here. What are the commandments? You know them. Okay, well, I've done all that; okay I've observed all that. “Well there is one more thing. Go and sell all you have, and then you will have treasure in heaven.” **So this idea of value, in what one values, and what one holds onto, what one lets go of becomes**

very essential in this reading. In itself it has nothing in particular to do with faith, except that there is a certain sort of acceptance of Jesus' trustworthiness. In that sense there's faith, but that's about it. **It's not a matter of what one believes; it's really about what one does.** So we have to keep in mind what this is all about.

Now Mark goes on to talk about **how astonished the disciples are at Jesus' insistence that it's very "hard for those with wealth to enter the kingdom of God."** Now why they are astonished, I don't really know. That itself is another real enigma. As far as I know no one had ever said it before, so in that way it might be surprising, but why they should find it so difficult to accept, I don't know. But so they did, according to Mark. And Jesus insisted; he did not relent. He insisted that **"It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle."** Now the eye of a needle is **a very narrow part of a wall.** It doesn't mean actually a needle that you would use to sew with. It's talking about a narrow spot of a wall that was meant for people to get through but not animals. That's the whole idea. It's a defense sort of mechanism. People can slip through, but you can't bring an army through. You can't bring a caravan through. So that's Jesus' image now of the kingdom. **You can get in it if you are thin enough and fit enough and don't have a lot of excess baggage;** but if you have a lot of baggage, then you can't get in. You can't drag through, not enough room. That's what he wants us to think about.