

Homily—28th Sunday OT; B-cycle

Today's first reading from the book of Wisdom, and indeed the entire book of Wisdom, can be summed up in one simple sentence; *wisdom is found in those who seek the Lord.*

God is the source of wisdom, therefore truly wise people are people who seek God in their lives and do things to grow closer to him.

Wisdom has nothing to do with education, knowledge, or book learning.

Some of the wisest people I know have no more than a high school education, and I've known some real idiots with enough degrees to fill a wall.

OK. Keep that thought tucked in back of your head for now.

Our gospel today is a familiar scene. We've all heard this story a hundred times before.

A rich young man approaches Jesus and wants to know what he must do for eternal life.

Jesus quotes the commandments. But note this, he doesn't quote them in order.

He starts with the fifth commandment, thou shall not kill.

Then he quotes some others and ends with honor your father and mother, which is the fourth commandment, BEFORE thou shalt not kill.

And he doesn't quote the first three commandments at ALL!

That's bothered me for years! Why change the order? Why leave some out?

Could it be that Jesus really wasn't thinking his response through, and just rattled commandments off the top of his head as he thought of them? Possibly.

I personally don't buy that explanation, because I happen to be one of the people that believes that nothing is in the scriptures by accident.

So there's a reason for this, even if we haven't figured it out yet.

In this case, Jesus leads off with *you shall not kill*, because all sin kills in one sense or another. When someone commits adultery, they're killing the marriage bond.

When you steal, you're killing another's persons sense of security, you're killing their trust in other people.

In bearing false witness, lying, or gossiping, you kill another person's reputation.

When you fail to honor your father or mother, you're dishonoring the people that gave you life. I don't care how dysfunctional your family was growing up.

I don't care how your parents may have messed up your mind, one thing you have to give

them, you're here because of them. And for that alone, they deserve your respect.

The young man responds, "I have kept all of these from my youth."

But Jesus isn't done yet. Then Jesus says, "You're lacking in one thing, go, sell what you have, give it to the poor, then come follow me."

If you're wondering where the first three commandments went, here they are.

Jesus was inviting this young man to be a disciple. Who knows, if he had done it, he may have been one of the apostles, or may have been chosen to succeed Judas Iscariot instead of Saint Matthias. We'll never know, because he refuses Jesus' invitation.

This young man may have been rich, but he wasn't wise, because he didn't put seeking the Lord above his other goals and ambitions.

And that's why I believe Jesus doesn't initially include the first three commandments.

Because greed, materialism, obsession with things kills the soul. We kill ourselves.

It's spiritual suicide. What are the commandments Jesus left out?

I am the Lord your God, don't worship anything else but me.

Don't desecrate my name, and keep holy the Sabbath Day.

What are the three classic forms of idolatry? Money, flesh, and power.

Even the flesh, while I'm not excusing it, is at least a sin of human weakness.

Sins of the flesh are often sins of opportunity; a perfect storm of circumstances that allow the sin to take place, and the individual just lacks the moral strength to resist.

OR, sins of the flesh take place because of misguided emotions; infatuation is mistaken for love, or it's misguided empathy or sympathy that goes to far.

There are many circumstances that can lend to sins of the flesh.

But greed and power must occur by conscience decision.

If you want wealth you have to make a decision to relentlessly pursue it, you have to make wealth the object of your life.

In greed you have to make a conscious decision to close your eyes and your heart to the suffering of others.

So Jesus initially omits the first three commandments because if your obsessed with money, you ARE worshipping something else beside God; you are NOT keeping holy the Sabbath, because

as Saint John put it, “how can you claim to love the God you cannot see while at the same time hating the brother you can see?”

And in pretending to do so, to wear you pietism proudly, “I have kept all of these from my youth,” and yet be unwilling to sacrifice some of your comfort to alleviate the suffering of the poor, you ARE profaning his name.

So Jesus really did include all of the commandments, he just re-arranged them because he was trying to build this young man up, entice him, so he’d take the next step and become a disciple.

And when he doesn’t accept the invitation, Jesus says, “How hard it is for those with wealth to enter the kingdom of God,” and Jesus gives us this image; “it’s easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Now Jesus could be speaking metaphorically, but he may also be speaking literally.

Jerusalem was a heavily fortified city way on top of a steep hill.

One of the big fears ancient cities had, was enemy cavalry, soldiers on horseback.

Because if cavalry got past the outer walls, they could wreak havoc and confusion inside the city making it impossible for the defenders of the city to mount a secondary defense against the invading infantry, the soldiers on foot.

Jerusalem had a solution for this. It was called the narrow gate, or the eye of the needle.

The eye of the needle was a city gate so small, a horse couldn’t pass through it.

A camel could, because a camel can get down on its knees and crawl, but only after all of the goods loaded on the camel were stripped off and carried in ahead of, or behind the camel.

And so in this illustration Jesus is saying it is POSSIBLE for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God, but only if he’s willing to be stripped of his wealth.

It’s no coincidence when a scribe asks Jesus what the most important commandment is, Jesus responds, “*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your soul, and with all your strength. The second is like it, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. It is on these two the whole law is based and the prophets as well.*”

All of the commandments stem from these two things. So be wise.

Make God the top priority of your lives.

Make your spiritual life a balance between the sins you avoid and the charity you do, and
you don't need to be afraid of anything life throws at you.