

While I don't play it, I know that in recent years Texas Hold-Em has become a TV spectator sport. You probably know that it has become such a phenomenon that a World Series of Poker has been established with a new \$1 million buy-in event. When players are confident that they have the winning hand of cards, they can bet all of their chips. The move, called "going all-in" forces all other players to match the bet or fold their cards. In today's Gospel Jesus told the man who wanted eternal life that he would first have to go all-in by selling everything and giving the proceeds to the poor. As St. Mark tells the story, "*(he folded) his face fell, and he went away sad - for he had many possessions.*"

It would be very easy to say that today's Gospel is about money. There are enough key words in the text to support that: 'rich', 'many possessions', and 'wealth'. Some Scripture scholars have actually counted the number of times the Bible as a whole speaks to the issue of money: 2350; and to the issue of prayer: 500 times. Obviously, money has been an issue with people and their relationship with God for a long time.

But I think focusing on the money issue narrows the topic too much. At first it may seem that money is what gets in the way of our relationship with God. But I think it is really what we use our money for that gets in the way. Most of us are not into accumulating piles of money ... most say they don't have any excess money. What happens today more often than not, is that money comes in and goes out too fast, and even that money goes out much faster than it comes in. (Let me say this cautiously, we don't like it when our government does this, but we do it a lot ourselves on an individual and family level: we spend more than we have.) I invite you to think about what you use your money on. What is it that makes it go out faster than it comes in? When you decide an answer for that question, then I think you will also have found what is standing between you and God. You will also have found what is standing between you and being a good disciple of Jesus Christ.

And .... let me push this a bit farther with you .... when you reach an answer for those questions, you will also know what it is that is taking up your time and your energy. Those are the real issues, I think: time, energy and talents. What was taking up the time, energy and gifts of the young man in today's Gospel story? We don't know exactly, but he folded when Jesus asked him to jump all-in and follow him. After all, it seems the young man was interested in Jesus. Interested enough at least, to ask what he needed to do to have eternal life. That is a great start. He just got stuck when he heard the answer. Jesus invited him to 'go all-in', but he could not ..... at least at the time we catch him in today's story. Maybe he came back later. And that is another important issue worth our consideration.

What is it that takes your time and energy and talents now? ..... and what can make that change?

In 3 weeks there is a Family Matters – Mission of Love Conference in Waterloo. It is a chance to hear some good speakers, enjoy some great Christian music, and even hear the Archbishop speak. It is close by, and if you need some money to pay the attendance fee, just ask me for what you need. I know some of the conflicts you may be thinking of:

- the next day is the Parish Bazaar ..... but we all know that not everyone helps on Saturday. Some in the parish are available to attend.
- field work ..... but there has been great weather thus far, and maybe a day off would be relaxing and even enriching
- football game – there will probably be a few of those that day
- soccer matches - there are always those, they seem to dominate life these days
- it may be a nice day, and there is yard work to do

If you have used these or similar reasons for not giving time and energy to gospel questions like we hear today, you are certainly not the first and only person to do so. There are several examples of people in the gospel who respond to Jesus with an 'all-in' manner, and there are other examples of people who do not. But those who do respond with an 'all-in' attitude live new and full and joy-filled lives; those who don't go away 'sad'.

I mentioned earlier that maybe the young man came back to Jesus later. There is always this possibility. Maybe he just got tired of being sad. Maybe he just got tired of all the things that kept him previously occupied. Maybe he just realized that he had given Jesus the short end of the stick, the short end of his life. Maybe he just thought about a change. Hopefully change is possible for all of us.

Attending a Church Conference is not the end and be all of our Christian living, but if we listen seriously to today's First Scripture, seeking Wisdom is the end and be all of life. The wise person of God says, *“I preferred wisdom to scepter and throne, and I deemed riches nothing in comparison with her.”* The wise person, the person of God, judges gold to be like sand, and silver to be like mud. Even health and beauty come in second to Wisdom. And interestingly enough, when you do choose Wisdom, *“all other good things came along as well”*.

It seems to me that this is simply good stewardship. Stewardship is not all about money. Stewardship is about my time, my energy, my personal gifts, my interests .... are these directed to the one who has given me everything? Or, do I continue to direct and use my time, my energy, my gifts and my interests only for my personal self?

May the *Word of God that is living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword penetrate us* this week, even down *into our joints and marrow*. May God's Word and God's Wisdom open our eyes to the thoughts and reflections of our hearts, and open us to the one to whom we all must in the end give an account.