

POST #6 - FOR THE SAKE OF HIS HEART

A HEART PIERCED BY THORNS
MEDITATIONS BY A DAUGHTER OF THE MOTHER OF SORROWS



6. *For the Sake of His Heart*

A. *Scripture reading:*

Mark 10:17-22 –

¹⁷ As he [Jesus] was setting out on a journey, a man ran up, knelt down before him, and asked him, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” ¹⁸ Jesus answered him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. ¹⁹ You know the commandments: ‘You shall not kill; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; you shall not defraud; honor your father and your mother.’” ²⁰ He replied and said to him, “Teacher, all of these I have observed from my youth.” ²¹ Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said to him, “You are lacking in one thing. Go, sell what you have, and give to [the] poor and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” ²² At that statement his face fell, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions.

(also)

Luke 5:27-32 –

²⁷ After this he went out and saw a tax collector named Levi sitting at the customs post. He said to him, “Follow me.” ²⁸ And leaving everything behind, he got up and followed him.

B. *Meditation:*

Place yourself again with the disciples as they accompany our Lord through Galilee and Judea. For weeks, you have been following the Master, listening to His every word . . . wondering at His wisdom . . . marveling at His miracles. What are you thinking now? After all these months, are you still undecided, wondering if you should keep on following when it means having no certainty of what tomorrow will hold, not even knowing whether it will hold anything for you? Should you go on, traipsing from village to village, from city to city . . . or should you go back to your own town and get on with your life, maybe making some adjustments, some changes, because of the words you have heard? Perhaps, in your heart, you already know that it is not just the words and miracles: there is something about this Man . . . something that draws you to keep following. You watch as He and His friends get ready to leave, to go to yet another town, but still you hesitate, uncertain.

As you stand there pondering, considering the options, a young¹ man pushes his way to the front and kneels before Jesus. By the way he is dressed, you can tell he has money, and you wonder what he will ask for—another servant to be healed maybe?—No, he wants something for himself . . . something good to desire: eternal life. Listening to the conversation, you decide that the man is not only rich but even pious, a keeper of the Law. Why should he be worried? He has it made! Right? In fact, as you look at the Master’s face, you can see that He is looking at this rich young man with great love. So, it seems right to feel fairly sure that Jesus will commend him for his godly zeal and then send him back home with a reassuring smile. But *no*, instead you hear Jesus tell him that there is still one thing lacking: “Go,” He says, “and sell what you have,

¹ Cf. *Matthew* 19:20, 22.

and give the money to the poor. Then come, and follow Me.”—As you watch the young man turn away, do you see the sadness on his face, the evident disappointment?

Why did the Master ask for the impossible? Was He not expecting too much, especially from someone who has so much? The man had not come asking to become a follower: all he was asking for was eternal life!—Do you wonder then: what about those who *do* follow? What about someone who only has a little? What about yourself? Would Jesus actually expect you to give up everything . . . absolutely everything?

Yes, you have been following the Teacher for some months now, but you have not yet made any commitment. At any moment you could go back—back to your old job, your comfortable home, your former plans. Or maybe you could follow, staying close to the Master, but still hold onto a little, just for security. You are fairly sure your brothers would keep some of your possessions for you; they might even keep your business going. Then you remember some of their comments about this “miracle worker” (as they call Him), and you wonder if maybe you need to be cautious and think a little more about your own reputation. What would your relatives and friends say if you were to become one of the Master’s *real* followers? And you ask yourself, “How can anyone do it? How can anyone really give up everything?”

You look over at the men getting ready to go, and you recall some of their stories. Those four over there: they were fishermen, but they left their nets, their boats, their homes—*everything!*—when the Master asked them to. And then there is Levi, or Matthew as some call him: he was a tax collector, but Jesus stood before him one day, said, “Follow Me,” and the man left it all.—Is *that* the answer? Jesus *specifically* asked them to follow Him. And you think to yourself, “He never really asked *me* or told *me* to get rid of what I have. So I am free: I can do what I want.”

What *do* you want? You stand there watching, and in your heart you know you want to go with them. You want to hold onto some things, but you also want to go with the Master. There is something about Him, something more than words and miracles. And as you glance at Jesus again, you see that He is looking at you . . . and He is looking at you with love . . . with *great* love.

C. Reflection:

In prayer today, ask our Lord, “What does it mean to follow You . . . to *really* follow You?” Then, while you wait for the answer, call to mind your earlier meditations. Can you still hear the sound of Christ’s weeping and see the tears on His face? Do you remember how He looked at you and the tears you yourself shed, there in the courtyard? Can you still see Him striding into that field where, as far as your eyes could see, children were struggling, unable on their own to escape from the briars? And do you see Him turning again to look at you and holding out to you His thorn-pierced heart?

By now, you know that following Christ means more than keeping the Ten Commandments and the precepts of the Church. You know it requires more than a faithful reception of the Sacraments and a regular prayer life. All of these are necessary, but even together they still are not enough. What would be enough? Can anything less than *everything* ever be enough? If Christ were to come to you now, personally, and say, “Sell what you have . . . give to the poor . . . and follow Me,” what would your answer be? Do you think you would be willing to do it . . . to really do it?

This is a *personal* challenge. Ask yourself: am I willing to live a life of simplicity, of material simplicity?—Writings from the Church Fathers, numerous papal documents, and even the documents of Vatican II, make it clear that a life of simplicity is not only for those who make a specific vow of poverty. In

one sense it is asked of every follower of Christ.² However, it is explicitly stated as being expected particularly of those in holy orders, bishops³ and priests⁴ alike.—Ask yourself also whether you are willing to let go of your dreams and your plans. Are you willing to sacrifice, if necessary, some social connections and maybe even some friendships? Are you ready to accept being called a fool or a failure by members of your own family?—All these are things to consider.

Take a few moments to reflect on the parable of the sower who went out scattering seed. Some of that seed fell among thorns. Remember what Jesus said about the plants that tried to grow there: “. . . they are the people who hear the word, but worldly anxiety, the lure of riches, and the craving for other things intrude and choke the word, and it bears no fruit.”⁵ If you desire to follow Jesus—or if you are even now with Him in the field—are you willing to get rid of all those seemingly harmless thorns that not only choke the spiritual life but also make a ministry less fruitful?

If you say you are willing, take action. Examine your friendships, your use of time, your expectations, your motives, and your desires. Look at your possessions. What are you holding onto? What are you seeking? Are you wanting something for yourself—even some good thing? Or are you going to set self aside and let go of everything for the sake of the compassion of Christ—not for what you will get out of it, but simply for the sake of the Heart of Christ? Of our own selves, this is impossible, but through the grace of God at work in our hearts, it can become possible. In the end, the question becomes, “Are you willing to allow God to make you willing?”

Do you really *want* to follow Christ? As you consider your answer, turn your eyes away from everything you might have to leave behind, away from everything you might ever be asked to leave behind. Look only at Jesus. Keep your eyes fixed on Him. As you look at Jesus, do you notice that He is looking at you? . . . He is looking at you with *great* love.

² Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, can. 222.

³ Cf. *Christus Dominus*, 15c.1b; *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 17g; *C.I.C.*, can. 387.

⁴ Cf. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 17; *C.I.C.*, can. 282.

⁵ *Mark* 4:18-19