

28th Sunday B

October 14, 2018

St. Patrick

Theme: You can't buy salvation.

“You know the commandments,” Jesus reminds the man who wanted to know what to *do* to inherit eternal life.

Oh, we know the Ten Commandments, too. But Jesus slips in another commandment. Did you notice it in the Gospel reading today? Tucked among those he just listed, Jesus also said, **“You shall not defraud.”**

With his **“Do not defraud,”** that two-edged sword of Jesus' word sliced the soul of that wealthy man, and he didn't even know he was bleeding. Of all the people spoken of in St. Mark's Gospel, this is the *only* person whom the Gospel specifically says that, **“Jesus loved him.”**

And, of all the people spoken of in St. Mark's Gospel, this guy is the *only* person who walked away from Jesus. The Gospel puts it matter-of-factly: **“And he went away sad, for he had many possessions.”**

If he had a lot of possessions, it means that he was holding onto what was due others. He had defrauded them. Jesus added the commandment to point that out.

Jean-Dominique Bauby, a Frenchman, died suddenly from pneumonia two days after his book was published, the book entitled The Diving Bell and the Butterfly. At the age of 42, he had everything going for him. On that fateful day of December 8, 1995, he was test driving a new, sleek BMW. The night before he had slept with his beautiful new girlfriend, and worked that day as the famed editor-in-chief of France's best known women's fashion magazine. Driving in that BMW--without any warning-- he suffered a massive stroke. He was completely paralyzed by the stroke, caused by a rare condition called the “locked-in syndrome.” His mind was untouched. He remained alert, quick. The only thing he could move was his left eyelid.

After the stroke, Bauby wrote this book. How? His speech therapist taught him to communicate through the so-called “Alphabet of Silence.” She called out the letters of the alphabet (one by one, arranged by their frequency of use), and when the desired letter was said, he blinked. Robbed of any use of his body, except his

left eyelid, Bauby dictated his story, letter by letter, with some 200,000 blinks of his eye.

One episode Bauby told in his book. It was Father's Day, with the visit of his two children. His 9-year-old asks during the visit if he wants to play a game: "Want to play hangman?"..." And Bauby writes about his son: "And I ache to tell him that I have enough on my plate playing quadriplegic...My heart is not in the game. Grief surges over me. His face not 2 feet from mine, my son sits patiently waiting --and I, his father, have lost the simple right to ruffle his bristly hair, clasp his downy neck, hug his small, lithe, warm body tight against mine. There are no words to express it. My condition is monstrous, iniquitous, revolting, horrible. Suddenly I can take no more. Tears well and my throat emits a hoarse rattle that startles my son."

Stripped of all vestiges of wealth, power, prestige...his story tells how he sees life so differently. And the last page of his book ends with this searing question: "Does the cosmos...not contain a currency strong enough to buy my freedom back?"

Money talk: "buying back my freedom." That's why, in today's Gospel, Jesus goes after the rich man's Achilles' heel: You see, wealth buys power and, often, the delusion that--if only you have enough of it--you don't need anything else.

Jesus' teaching: You can't buy salvation. It's not a human achievement; it's God's gift, and it can't be bought. Notice how the rich man first poses the question to Jesus: "**Good Teacher, what must I *do* to inherit eternal life?**" He's used to making things happen: he's a doer.

And notice what Jesus says later to his disciples: "**Children: how hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God.**" Grown-ups, these followers of Jesus, and here he calls them "children." Why? It goes back to the Gospel story we heard last Sunday, just before today's Gospel reading from Mark: the disciples had been trying to shoo away some small kids. "**Let the children come to me...for the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these...Whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it.**"

"**Good Teacher, what must I *do* to inherit eternal life?**" An inheritance...of eternal life. Small kids don't *do* anything for an inheritance: they simply receive it, as a gift...no different from a hug.

Jean-Dominique Bauby couldn't buy a hug for his child. And the rich man in today's Gospel couldn't receive the inheritance of eternal life because he kept clutching to his many possessions. His possessions meant more to him than did Jesus.

The Kingdom isn't to be earned; it's to be received as a small child receives a gift.

“Children,” so Jesus calls *us* today: What about us? As God's children, we have been given the gift of salvation, the give of the inheritance. We need only to accept the gift...unless—unless possessions, or something else, really mean more to us than does Jesus.