

“Then who can be saved?!” Mark 10:17-31

And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments: “Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.”” And he said to him, “Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth.” And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, “You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, “Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.” And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, “Then who can be saved?” Jesus looked at them and said, “With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God.” Peter began to say to him, “See, we have left everything and followed you.” Jesus said, “Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”

Today, when one more little child, Manny Dutschke, was adopted as a child of God, it is fitting to reflect on this passage and what exactly it means to be a Christian.

As this passage reveals, there are widespread misunderstandings regarding Christianity – so often people confuse Christian faith and following Jesus with religion. Our Christian faith, our Christian worldview is not a religion! No!

In fact, if you are religious you can't be Jesus follower. That's true. Let's see how this Gospel texts helps us to learn and to understand what the Triune God demands from us and what He offers us.

“Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” This was the young man's question. Can you see what the problem with this question is? What this man's assumption was? Can you see it? He thought that he could inherit eternal life by what he did, by how he lived.

This is what religious people ask. And when I say ‘religions people’, it doesn't mean only those who follow certain religious teachings. We can instead say ‘moral people’, those who want to be good in their own eyes and in the eyes of others, and possibly, if such a need occurs, also in the eyes of God.

They may ask more general a question: “What should I do to be a good, moral person? How should I live that, in case, if there is a god, he would be compelled to admit that I have done a great job with my life.”

This is exactly what this young man asked. “What should I do?” Jesus replied: **“You know the commandments: “Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.”**

Jesus simply repeated those commandments, which people know the best. That is, those about our relationships and life in community. Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not lie, honor you parents.

You will know this from your own experience how people usually think. If you ask them what their relationships with God are, they will often start telling that they haven’t done anything wrong. They haven’t murdered anyone, or stolen anything, and so on.

This is how religious people think about their relationships with God, and this is how people often misunderstand what it means to be a Christian. Don’t murder, don’t steal, don’t commit adultery ... too often, don’t lie, and you may sometimes listen to your parents as well, and then - you are a good Christian.

Similarly as many of our neighbors, friends and relatives, also this young man was trying to be a good, moral person. **“Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth.”** And don’t think that he was hypocritical or arrogant.

Probably he was as genuine as he could be. He had done his best. We can read that also **“Jesus, looking at him, loved him...”** Jesus loved Him, but nevertheless.... and now we get to the very heart of the problem with Jesus.

You see, most people actually like commandments. Because they are helpful. They help us and help community, they structure our lives and when we live according to them, it feels good. And we think ‘that’s it – that’s what it means to be a Christian’.

The great offense of Christianity comes with what Jesus said the next. **“You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.”** What?!

As I said, many people actually like God’s law. Not all of it, of course, but that part which they can try to keep. But then Jesus says something that ruins the whole party.

What did Jesus actually demand from this young man? The same that He demands from each of us. Stop being religious! Stop focusing on yourself! Focus on Jesus! Jesus demands undivided commitment “follow me, whatever the cost is!”

Put it otherwise, Jesus demanded that this young man would focus on the first three commandments, not of the last seven. This is what shocks and offends people about Christ's message. This is what makes following Christ so hard.

This is what puts people off. Instead of loving ourselves and delighting in our good lives, Jesus Christ actually demands us to love Him more than anything. Instead of focusing on our good works He demands us to focus on relationships with Him.

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment.” You shall have the Triune God and Jesus Christ as the most important in your life. As the number One. As the highest priority.

In case of this young man Jesus said: “Sell everything, give to the poor.” This is not some kind of general command to get rid of your possession. The problem was that this young man loved his possessions more than he loved Jesus. He may have been good by keeping less important commandments, but he had failed to keep the main one. The only one which matters the most.

What you love the most is your true god. For this young man his true god was his possessions. He loved his wealth more than he loved Jesus. It's not that possessions and wealth are evil. Not at all. The Bible speak about wealth as God's blessing.

However, this is also true that nothing boasts our arrogance, pride and self-satisfaction more than wealth. It makes us feel that we are really in control of our lives, that we don't need Jesus Christ as our God and Savior. For we already (seemingly) have everything that we may need.

On the other hand, even if poverty is really bad, this is also true that when you are not in control over your life, you are much more open to receive God's mercy and to admit our continuous need for His care.

Perhaps this young man was a really good person. He genuinely tried to do his best. But once Jesus pointed that He actually loved his possessions more than true God, **“disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful...”**

We love different things more than Jesus Christ. Admit it! The most of all we love ourselves. We love our freedom to make up our mind regarding what is good and what is not. We love to decide on our own what life is pleasing to God, and even what God is like.

We love to live in a way that makes us feel that we are really good people. We love good things in our lives, our spouses, our children, our families, our work ... and we love them more than we love our Father in Heaven and His Son Jesus Christ.

And we don't see that this is a problem until Jesus says ‘leave everything and follow me!’ When people hear that they need to leave all of this for the sake of

Jesus Christ, and that they have not even a smallest chance to enter the Kingdom of God by their own genuine and noble efforts, people get upset. Really upset!

“How do you, Jesus, dare to say something like that! We are happy to live as moral people, but don’t push us too hard, or you will lose us!” As if He needed us and not the other way around.

The irony of our reaction is that we usually don’t understand that this is our sin, our rebellion against God, our selfishness that forces us to disobey Christ. This is the very thing that separates us from God and eternal life. This deep rebellion against our Creator.

This is why Jesus had to die, to free our hearts from this self-righteous rebellion against our God. What Jesus is asking us is nothing else than to live according to God’s design for our lives.

To live up to our true nature, to embrace what it means to be truly human, that is, to love God our Creator and Redeemer, to trust Him and to rejoice in our creaturely nature as the greatest gift.

We don’t understand all of that, for we are the slaves of our sin. Our hearts, our wills are in rebellion against true God, - and we want to be gods ourselves. We want to decide what is good, and what is not. No one is going to tell us what to do!

This is why Christianity is so offensive, so shocking. It demands us to abandon our religion, to stop trusting our own lives, to leave our self chosen gods and put our whole trust in Christ Jesus.

To follow Him, whatever it may cost. This is why so many find following Jesus Christ too hard. They better chose to be religious, moral people without true God, without future.

So far it was all about what Jesus Christ demands from us. Now we need to understand what God offers us. Once Jesus told that we can’t enter into Kingdom of God on our own, by being good persons, Peter and the disciples got really concerned. **“Then who can be saved?”**

I want you to hear these words and let them sink in. For they are so important.

“It is impossible for you, but all things are possible with God”. “Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”

Yes, Jesus asks you to leave what is the most important for you, what you love the most, your true gods, and to follow Him. If you want to know what your gods are, think what you fear to lose the most? What are those things without which you can't imagine your life?

When Jesus ask us to leave them, it may appear unfair, it may appear that He is robbing you of what makes your life good, but, in fact, it is the very opposite.

People have often misunderstood this and have literary abandoned their most important vocations thinking that thus they are pleasing please God. This is not what Jesus is asking for.

When Jesus invites you to follow Him and to leave everything else, He takes your whole life and re-arranges it in a way it is supposed to be. With God the Father and Jesus Christ in the center, and all other good things flowing from there. He wants you to fear the most to lose Him, your God and Savior.

He helps you to understand, that God is the Giver of all good things, and all good things in our lives are simply His gifts. The Holy Spirit teaches us that the Giver is much more important that the gifts.

He helps you to trust that if only you have Jesus, you will have everything you may need. Then you can strive to be with the Giver, with Jesus Christ, and other things will be added to you.

This is true, there could be situations, when following Jesus requires to leave something forever, but it is about things or habits that are harmful for us. When it comes to good things in your live it is so different.

Once you realize that the Triune God is the source of all good things in your live, you can be at peace, you can enjoy them as God's gracious gifts, given to you so that you can benefit from them.

Do you know what Jesus does when you love Him the most and follow Him? He takes all good things - your spouse, children, family, work, carrier, hobbies, friends, etc., and makes them even better.

When you learn how much Jesus loves you, you are enabled to love more. When you learn how much Jesus forgive, you are enabled to forgive more. He purifies and transforms all your relationships and everything you do.

Jesus makes your marriage better, He makes you family relationships better, He makes your work, your carrier more meaningful, He changes everything in your life, all its dimensions and fills them with joy, peace and meaning.

What you had before is transformed and perfected as you try to follow Jesus, and on top of that you receive so much more once you join His Church, His family, His

chosen people. You receive hundredfold already in this life and in the age to come - eternal life. This is how Jesus works.

This is what He offers to you. To each of you. We can see that to be a Christian is such a privilege, such an unbelievable gift of God, if only we are brave enough, and strong enough to follow Jesus.

Once more - this is what it means to be a Christian: to turn away from our religious efforts to be moral persons, it is about following Jesus Christ, trusting Him above all things, allowing Him to transform our whole lives and to bring us in the most wonderful eternal fellowship with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

The fellowship which begins already here, in the Divine Service, and will continue forever. Remember it.

Amen.