

As an infant Jesus had some hardship, born in a stable, hunted by Herod, a refugee in Egypt but, returning home to Nazareth on the death of Herod, his teenage years and early adulthood were fairly comfortable.

Joseph was a carpenter, then as now, that was a good job and it has always been assumed that Jesus inherited the business from Joseph. He was known locally as the carpenter's son.

Then something momentous happened. He went to be baptized by John; the Holy Spirit came upon him and he felt called to a new vocation, called to proclaim a new kingdom, the kingdom of God's merciful love.

He dropped everything, gave up his job, had no home of his own, supported by the good will of women who followed him.

Therefore his asking the man to sell all and give to the poor and follow him was in line with his own life. Jesus never asked anyone to do something that he himself was not ready to do.

The man in the gospel was a truly good man. He kept all the commandments. He clearly felt that there was something more, he had higher aspirations. He felt as St. Augustine did: "You have made us for yourself O God and our hearts are restless until they rest in You".

The man's heart was restless, but the cost of a heart at peace, he judged to be just too much. It is a sad story.

Is Jesus asking all his followers to sell all, to give up everything? Is he asking you and me? The man in the Gospel had many possessions, there are not many of us in that category.

There have been people who have taken him seriously, St. Francis and Mother Teresa come to mind, as do the very early Christians.

We are told in the Acts of the Apostles that they sold their lands and put all the money into a common account from which they could draw according to their needs. It was a true communist community. A bold experiment. But it did not last, human greed took over.

We too are challenged by Jesus, but could it be that the question Jesus is asking us to pose to ourselves is not: What do I own but, more importantly, what owns me?

Is there something that is preventing me from being a better Christian, is there something interfering with my prayer life, is there something preventing me from loving God and others as I am called to do?

It might be physical possessions, but it also might very well be –envy, jealousy, prejudice, anger, greed, selfishness or some addiction. Am I possessed by such, do they own me?

Jesus invited the man to follow him. How, where? He tells us that he is the way, he lays out for us the path, the trail we are to follow.

The trail is well marked, sometimes it is a twisty, bumpy one, quite a hike, at times our backpack may be just too heavy, and we are never going to reach the end of the trail if we do not somehow lighten the load.

So, the question for all of us is this: what do I need to take out of my backpack, what do I really need as opposed to what I want?

What is going to make walking in the way, the path, the trail of Jesus easier? What must I dump? How hard will it be to do so?

What gives us courage to make the decision are the words of Jesus: all things are possible with God. Our salvation is not of our own doing, it is the free grace, the free gift of God and we can be certain that we will receive sufficient grace to see us to the end of the trail, to see us to heaven, sufficient grace for us to make the needed sacrifice of those things that possess us.

It may be a struggle but I have a favorite saying: the victory is in the struggle, the victory is in the struggle.. We do our best to lighten the load. Our effort may not be heroic but if it is our best at this moment, that is enough for God.

The disciples rightly asked: who can be saved? We all can. Jesus died that all might be saved: He said: my grace is sufficient for you.

Let us renew our faith in Jesus, in our loving merciful God and trust that indeed his grace will be sufficient for us.

Amen