

1. What shall we make of this story? We can easily imagine it happening. We usually label it the story of the rich *young* man, although it is only in Mt that he is identified as a young man. But all three evangelists agree in describing him in two other ways. First, he is a man who has kept all the commandments from his youth: he has not committed adultery, has not stolen, has not borne false witness against his neighbor, has not defrauded anyone, and has honored his mother and father. He is, in short, a moral person, a good man. Secondly, he is rich. But, despite his good character and his wealth, he feels that there is something missing in his life. He wants something more, though he is not sure what this more could be. Maybe it doesn't exist. Maybe there is no "more" and he should be content with his good moral life and his wealth. And so he presents his problem to this man who is making such a name for himself, this Jesus of Nazareth, who seems to be so wise and powerful, who can even cure people who are sick, and who keeps talking about the Kingdom of God.

2. The reception he gets from Jesus is promising. In fact, in Mark's Gospel, but only there, we have the sentence which says that Jesus looked at him with love. Jesus was impressed by this man. And Jesus tells him that he is right. There is a "more." Something is lacking in his life. And what is even better, Jesus even offers him a way of filling in this hole, this lack. Jesus issues him an invitation to be his disciple: "Come, follow me." But, in order

to do that, the man must first divest himself of his wealth: “Go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.”

3. The man could not do that. He wanted something more, but he was not willing to do without the things he already had. His wealth, his possessions, meant too much to him. In short, he did not want the “more” if it meant that he would have less. So he went off. But we are told that he went off sad. The hole in his life remained. It would now be permanent. In fact, we have to say that he preferred to have it so rather than take a chance on finding something which would satisfy him perfectly.

3. This rich young man went to Jesus with his problems. He could also have gone to his scriptures. He could have read what we have read today as our first reading. There he would have learned that the hole in his life could not be filled by money or power or health or beauty, that it can only be filled by pursuing wisdom. And to be wise is to fear, to love the Lord above all things, even oneself.

4. Many people seem to kick around a great deal and reach a ripe old age before they settle down to seek God and to make him the center of their lives. Augustine felt that it was like that with himself, though he was in fact still young, just 33, when he finally turned his life around. But in his view he had learned very late in life to love God. “Late have I loved thee, late have I loved Thee, O Beauty, ever ancient, ever new,” he wrote.

5. At some moments of our lives everything seems to be in place. We realize that we are in this moment happy, content, and that all is as it should be. But

such moments are few and far between. Most of the time we live in a stretch. We are striving for something we don't yet have or trying to hold on to something which is about to escape from us. In a sense this way of living is more natural to us because we live in time and therefore we are always leaving something behind and going towards the new. And yet even now we recognize the fact that this is not the ideal. We wish we could have both past and present and future as one. We long to be beyond time.

6. However, if we try to put God and his will first in our lives, and for us that means to be disciples of Jesus, to live as he lived because he is God made human and become human in order to teach us how to live, then we can experience a wholeness in our lives. For then we are in touch with the whole.

7. St. Paul is a good example of being touch with this whole. As a young man he had been a Pharisee, and as a Pharisee he had sought to keep all the laws. But then he found Christ, or rather Christ found him. And then we hear him use extravagant, romantic language about this find. He speaks of all he had as a Pharisee and as a Jew, a member of God's chosen people, but when he compares all these privileges to his new found knowledge of Christ he says: "For his sake I have accepted the loss of all things and I consider them so much rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him"(Phil 3:8-9).

8. Rubbish, it is all so much rubbish in comparison with gaining Christ, with trying to be his disciple, making our decisions, choosing our values so as to be like Jesus, trying, as Paul says, to put on the mind of Christ. If we make

this effort, then, unlike the rich young man, we will not go away sad. No, we will stay with Jesus, we will accept his invitation, and we will be happy.