

Wealth and money has been to the forefront in the gospel readings for the past few weekends. As ever, of course, we have to set things in context and properly understand what is being said.

In today's parable, for example, the rich man is not consigned to torment in Hades simply *because* he was rich; he was consigned to Hades because he did absolutely nothing to help Lazarus, the poor man at his gate. Money in itself is never condemned in the gospel; it is the failure to use it lovingly, to help those less fortunate that receives Jesus' censure.

The Lord told certain people to give away all they possessed and then follow him; like the rich young man who went away sad when Jesus suggested this. However, money or possessions isn't the point: in all cases, Jesus tells us to get rid of *that which most keeps us from God*; in this particular case, it just happened to be the young man's wealth. Some of us are most kept from God by our pride, or the way we judge others, or our refusal to forgive. Money is easy to get rid of – it's much harder to get rid of our contempt or our jealousy or our self-conceit. Whatever *most* keeps us from an authentic relationship with God, is what Jesus always urges us to

abandon. None of us are going to be asked to give up what money or possessions we may have – however much or however little – *unless* it is precisely our money and possessions which keeps us from closeness to God.

In Luke 14:33, when Jesus says: “In the same way, none of you can be my disciple unless he gives up all his possessions”, he really and truly means that we must give up everything that *possesses us*. Because whatever we cannot give up possesses us, and not the other way round.

In other gospel passages – such as last week’s reading – Jesus urges us to *use* money, even if this is in a dubious way; he is able to say this because he is also absolutely clear about the status of money and wealth: it belongs to this world with all its kingdoms and empires, that have little to do with the kingdom of God. So, if it is part and parcel of what keeps the cogs of our world turning, we should use it – if we have it – for the world that is coming but not yet here.

We are also told in the gospels that a group of women who were among Jesus’ followers, provided for him and the apostles out of their own resources. If they had given away all they possessed, they wouldn’t have *had* any resources. If we

beggar ourselves today, we will have nothing to give the beggar tomorrow. The rich man in today's gospel parable should have helped the poor man at his gate – but he didn't, and this is why he was sent to Hades. But: people with nothing at all can go to Hades too. Everything depends upon what we have in our heart.