

SUNDAY

by SUNDAY

by Joan Mitchell, CSJ

Open a bible, and light a candle beside it. Have group members each write on a small piece of paper a favorite phrase or saying from scripture that represents words they live by.

LEADER: God’s word is living, sharper than any two-edged sword.

ALL: Let it penetrate to our spirits, our joints, and marrow.

LEADER: Let us pray the Holy Spirit loosens the knots of human affairs.

ALL: And opens our hearts to hear where others are.

LEADER: Let God’s word call us to action.

ALL: To do the impossible through us.

that Jesus suggests “one thing more.”

We Catholic Christians watch and listen as bishops and lay delegates from around the globe gather in Synod conversation circles, call each other by first names, and envision the future together in hope and lament. Many bring to the conversations the pain of people who are poor and lack basics—food, water, education, medical care.

Some bring the shame LGBTQ folks and families feel when parish homilies condemn them. Others testify to the love same-sex relationships bring into their families and communities.

Many women do the work of deacons, preaching and teaching the gospels and serving their neighbors but cannot be ordained despite the service of women from the beginning among Jesus’ circle of disciples in the gospels.

I teared up when I read David Brooks opinion piece in the *New York Times* recently. He looks to religious progressives to do the work of cultural repair, “to build a modern social gospel around love of neighbor and hospitality for the marginalized” (July 11, 2024). I teared up because this is our

mission as Sisters of St. Joseph “to love God and neighbor without distinction.” Jesus identified these as the two great commandments.

In 1650, our religious community took to the streets and lived among the poor rather than in monasteries or cloisters. We aim to build communities of love. For us and for many the word *neighbor* is a verb. Pope Francis wants us to discern what spirit moves in us—the spirit of the world or the Holy Spirit and the spirit of the beatitudes. He insists holiness grows in paying attention to the small details of daily love as Jesus does:

the wine is running out;
 one sheep is missing;
 a widow giving two coins;
 spare oil for lamps;
 enough bread for the crowd;
 a fish cooking on the fire
 (*Gaudete et Exultate*, Rejoice and Be Glad, #143, 2018).

● What is “one thing more” you feel an urge to do?

● What spirit moves in you?

“What can I do?” Someone often asks that question after a lecture. The questioner is waking up to the topic and wants a takeaway.

A young man stops Jesus to ask a similar question in Sunday’s gospel. “What must I do to receive eternal life?” In answer Jesus names six of the ten commandments, the sacred do’s and don’t’s of Israel’s covenant with God.

The young man knows and keeps these commandments. He doesn’t murder, steal, cheat, commit adultery, or bear false witness. He respects his parents. The young man warms Jesus’ heart; he is so earnest and open



REUTERS/Carlos Garcia Rawlins

GOSPEL

Sell what you have, give to the poor, and come, follow me.



JESUS: How hard it will be for those with riches to enter the kingdom of God!

NARRATOR: These words shocked the disciples.

NARRATOR: As Jesus was starting on a journey, a man ran up and knelt down in front of him.

MAN: Good Teacher, what must I do to receive eternal life?

JESUS: Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. You must know the commandments:

“You shall not kill;
You shall not commit adultery;
You shall not steal;
You shall not bear false witness;
You shall not cheat;
Respect your father and mother.”

MAN: Teacher, ever since I was a child, I have obeyed all these commandments.

NARRATOR: Jesus looked at him and loved him.

JESUS: You need to do only one thing more. Go and sell what you have and give to the poor. You will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.

NARRATOR: When he heard this, the man felt sad and he went away, for he had many possessions.

JESUS: How hard for those trusting riches 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.

NARRATOR: At this the disciples were completely overwhelmed.

DISCIPLES: Who, then, can be saved?

JESUS: For humans this is impossible but not for God. All things are possible with God.

Mark 10.17-27

What relationship does Jesus envision between rich and poor?

On his journey to Jerusalem with the men and women who are following him, Jesus meets a man with a basic question about his purpose and destiny, “What must I do to receive eternal life?”

In his lifetime, Jesus was an itinerant preacher, who possessed no belongings and owned no home. Jesus sent his disciples out in the same way—with no food, money, bags, or second tunic.

Are all of Jesus’ followers to live this way? In the 40 years between Jesus’ public ministry and Mark’s writing of the first gospel, Christian communities faced questions Jesus did not

answer. Not surprisingly, they held conflicting views as they tried to live Jesus’ teachings and follow his example.

Like the rich young man, the Christians for whom Mark writes in A.D. 70 struggle with issues of wealth and human purpose. This problem persists and worsens in our world.

In our global neighborhood news travels fast about people’s needs. As a nation and as individuals the U.S and its citizens respond generously. With climate change we face new problems. We would need four Earths if everyone in the world lived our North American lifestyle.

● What that we have in the U.S. do you wish everyone on the planet had?

● What might we learn from people who are poor about how to change our lifestyles?

Several points of view about wealth gather around this young man’s conversation with Jesus. In literary form, this gospel passage is a paradigm (*para-dime*), a controversial question in a simple narrative setting.

A paradigm works like a graffiti wall or a blog post. It poses a question that invites dialog among varying points of view; Sunday’s gospel has three points of view about how to gain eternal life.

The young man represents the first point of view. He keeps the commandments. In the community for whom Mark wrote, he represents the Christians who continue to value the ten commandments they learned to keep as Jews. The commandments offer a common standard of goodness Christians still hold today.

The second point of view is more radical, “Go and sell all you have and give to the poor; then come, follow me.” Some Christians took Jesus’ own example literally. Some among the first Christians in Jerusalem sold their possessions and lived a community life (Acts 2.45).

Early Christian missionaries like Jesus’ first disciples imitated Jesus’ itinerant lifestyle. They depended on the hospitality of settled, propertied Christians for food and shelter in the towns where they preached.

The third viewpoint holds that everything is possible with God. We don’t know how the rich young man lives the rest of his life. All of us have to identify how we are rich and



how we are poor, how and in whom we want to invest our money and ourselves. All of us live within the mystery of God’s love in which the next person we meet may change our lives forever.

● **How are you rich? How are you poor?**

In his concern for people who are poor, Pope Francis imitates his namesake and the revolutionary document at the Second Vatican Council that reconnected the Church with the world and its problems, *Gaudium et Spes*. It calls the whole church to do “one thing more,” to act in solidarity with the poor and afflicted of our planet. The Constitution on the Church in the Modern World recognizes how interdependent the people of the planet are.

The Council reiterates the dignity of the human person and each person’s rights to food, shelter, clothing, education, and health care. These rights impose corresponding duties—that we are our brother’s and sister’s keepers, that we work for the common good and well-being of all.

The document defines the common good, “the sum total of social conditions that allow people, either as groups or individually, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily. ...Every group must take into account the needs and aspirations of every other group, and still more of the human family as a whole” (#26).

The common good includes future generations, Pope Francis points out. “We can no longer speak of sustainable development apart from intergenerational solidarity” (*Laudato Si’* #159).

DO SOMETHING



● Celebrate World Food Day, Tuesday, October 16, the day that marks the founding of the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FOA.org). Visit the World Food Day website. Encourage children in your family or parish to enter the World Food Day poster contest.

The riches that don't disappear arise out of our love of neighbor, Pope Francis reminds us. Jesus "gives us two faces, or better yet, the face of God reflected in so many other faces. For in every one of our brothers and sisters, especially the least, the most vulnerable, the defenseless, and those in need, God's very image is found" (#61). These are the riches that endure.

● **What more does Catholic social teaching ask of you today in your life?**



Wisdom is all a human being can desire.

Solomon chooses wisdom over wealth and power as his highest value, although he has more of both than most of Israel's rulers. In Israel's tradition wisdom is both practical knowledge of what works and a sense of one's place in the whole of God's creation.

In St. Katharine Drexel, one of our American saints, we have someone who learned in her family the wisdom of using wealth to help people in need. Her mother, Emma Bouvier Drexel, opened her home three days a week to people who needed food, clothing, rent money, and medicine, giving away about \$20,000 a year in the mid 1800s. Kate and her two sisters helped with this work. Their father's will put millions in his daughters' hands but out of reach of suitors.

Katharine began supporting Indian schools at the request of Bishop James O'Connor of Omaha, her parish priest in her teens. At an audience with Pope Leo XIII, Kate asked for more missionaries on the frontier. "Why don't you become a missionary yourself?" the pope asked.

Eventually Kate did, finding a void in her heart until she gave herself as well as her wealth to this work. She founded the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, built, and staffed almost 100 schools, including the first black Catholic university—Xavier University in New Orleans.

Long before most people knew what civil rights meant, Mother Katharine Drexel dedicated her money and her life to guaranteeing them for all people.

Solomon's choice

I prayed and prudence was given me; I pleaded and the spirit of Wisdom came to me. I preferred her to scepter and throne, and deemed riches nothing in comparison with her, nor did I liken any priceless gem to her, because all gold, in view of her, is a little sand; beyond health and comeliness I loved her. I chose to have her rather than the light, because the splendor of her never yields to sleep. Yet all good things together came to me in her company, and countless riches at her hands.

Wisdom 7.7-11

● **What is more precious to you than anything else?**

● **What would you do with your fortune?**

PRAY

Pray as a conclusion to your reflection on the Sunday scriptures. Consider what concerns or people you wish to pray for with the group and what actions you feel the Spirit prompts you to do. Use a Prayer of the Faithful format.

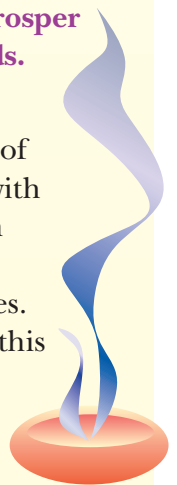
LEADER: Teach us to recognize the abandoned and include the excluded in our social and economic life.

Take turns voicing your concerns. Respond to each.

ALL: Teach us wisdom of heart, O God, and prosper the work of our hands.

LEADER: Each of us will take with us one of the pieces of paper with a scripture phrase on it that another of us remembers and values. Keep it to reflect on this week.

Exchange a sign of peace.



Joan Mitchell, CSJ, editor of Sunday by Sunday, holds a Masters in Theological Studies from Harvard Divinity School and a Ph.D. in New Testament from Luther Seminary, St. Paul, MN.