

28th Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)
(Wisdom 7:7-11 / Mark 10:17-30)
13.10.2024

Eternal Life – Life with Jesus now and for ever.

Dear brothers and sisters,

Today's gospel passage opens and ends with the mention of "eternal life". A rich man asks Jesus: "Good master, what must I do to inherit **eternal life**". Jesus ends his answer with these words: "those who have left everything and followed me will be repaid in the world to come with **eternal life**".

"Eternal life": what do these words mean? In his prayer on the eve of his passion, (Jn 17, 3) Jesus tells us that "eternal life is 'to know' the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent". In biblical language, 'to know' is not the conclusion of an intellectual process, but the fruit of an experience, a personal contact which, when it matures, becomes love. Consequently, we can say that eternal life is life with Jesus who said "I am the way, the truth and the life". Eternal life is life with Jesus who loves us and whom we love. Our life with Jesus, which started on the day of our baptism and which continues throughout our whole life time, day after day, will not end with death but will continue over and beyond death, to endure for ever. Death is not a senseless and violent end, but birth to fullness of life, entry into fullness of life, a new beginning of life, a continuation albeit at a different level of our earthly existence. This is what eternal life is: Life with the Lord now and for ever. We should not worry about how it will work out after death. But rather just trust Jesus' words! We should simply strive to live with Jesus here and now. The Lord will look after our life after death.

It is interesting to listen to Jesus' answer to the question of the rich man: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Follow the commandments (which are words of life, words for life), then, sell everything you have (even your good works, the fruit of your obedience to God) and give the profit to the poor; and then follow me. Life with Jesus now and for ever is not something which we can give to our self, by our actions, even our good actions, or by our self will; life with Jesus now and for ever is not something we possess. The rich man in the gospel passage "used 'to keep' all the commandments of God from his earliest days". The word "to keep" speaks volume, because we keep what we possess, don't we? It is as if that man, through his obedience to the Ten Commandments, had won for himself and so felt he possessed eternal life. It is as if that rich man thought he was able to acquire his own salvation by his good actions. It is as if that rich man considered that he was able to save himself. Jesus' answer is clear: eternal life is not something we win or acquire and possess, but something we have to ask for in prayer and receive as a gift! Eternal life, life with Jesus now and for ever is not about having, but about being: about following Jesus, being with him. It is Jesus who has the initiative, not us.

Another title given to Jesus is Wisdom of God. Eternal life is a life with the Wisdom of God now and for ever. In our first reading we heard the prayer of Solomon asking the Lord for the gift of Wisdom: "I prayed, and understanding was given me; I entreated, and the spirit of Wisdom came to me". We have to ask God in prayer for the gift of Wisdom, the gift of life with Jesus now and for ever: life which the Lord will give to us in his own way, in his own time.

Eternal life is not something we possess, but something or better someone whom we have to receive as a gift. We have to receive the presence of the Lord; we have to walk the path of life with the Lord whose presence and actions are surprising and unexpected most of the time. We have to consent to be poor in order to receive the richness of God's presence, God's wisdom. God's wisdom, or again life with the Lord now and for ever, is the most precious gift we can receive. We remember our first reading: we heard Solomon say: "I esteemed Wisdom more than sceptres and thrones. Compared with her, I held riches as nothing, and gold is a pinch of sand. Beside her, silver ranks as mud. I love her more than health or beauty, preferred her to the light". This should encourage us not be afraid to ask in prayer for the gift of the Lord's presence; let us not be afraid to live with him and follow him day after day, hour after hour, because, once again, life with Jesus now and for ever is the most precious gift we can receive.

The rich man wanted to be perfect. We all dream of being perfect and being recognized by others as perfect. We are even invited by the Lord to be perfect, but to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect. All depends on how we understand the word perfection. Christian perfection does not mean flawlessness. For a disciple of Jesus, to be perfect does not mean to have no deficiencies, no faults, no flaws. We are invited to be perfect as God is perfect, He who is the Living one par excellence. To be perfect is not about having, and always having more. It is not about getting the best, even the top marks in an exam. Perfection is about being with the Lord Jesus, walking with Him, following Him and becoming like Him. It is about living with the Lord. The Risen Lord, just before his Ascension promised to be with us until the end of time! To be perfect is to walk the path of life with Jesus now and for ever. To be perfect is about loving Jesus and lovingly serving our neighbours in whom we recognize the image and the presence of the Lord. To be perfect is to be with the Lord Jesus for ever as He is with us for ever.

With a most instant prayer, let us ask the Lord for the gift and the grace to live in communion with him, now and for ever.