

**Reflection on the Gospel-28th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B
(Mark 10:17-30)**

-Veronica Lawson RSM

Not too many of us commit murder or adultery. Not too many kidnap or take hostages or give false testimony in a court of law. Most are ready to honour and care for their parents in their old age. In other words, most of us are basically decent and honest and could make the same claim as does the wealthy man who runs up to Jesus, namely that we have kept the commandments from our youth. The man's question is actually a strange one. He wants to know what he must *do* in order to inherit eternal life. He seems unaware that inheritance depends, not on what one does, but on who one is. Jesus responds to his greeting, "Good Teacher", with a reminder that God is the source of all goodness, and then lets him know that keeping the commandments is not enough. Interestingly, Jesus adds a commandment that is not actually numbered among the "ten" but is to be found in an Essene document from Qumran: "You shall not defraud". This prepares the way for what follows.

First-century Mediterranean societies were "limited goods" societies. If a person acquired wealth, it was invariably understood to be at the expense of others. The wealthy were therefore looked upon with suspicion. Although Jesus looks at the man lovingly, he may nonetheless be hinting that his wealth has been acquired fraudulently. Jesus offers a challenge that the man is unable to meet: to sell what he has, give the proceeds to the poor, have "treasure in heaven", and "follow" him. The man retains his possessions and acquires a burden, the burden of sorrow. To share one's goods with those in need is too hard for some, Jesus admits, but not for those who are open to the power of God at work in their lives.

The concluding verses are puzzling. In declaring that those who have left everything and followed him are to have an abundance of this world's goods as well as eternal life, is Jesus modifying his earlier position? Is he reverting to a tradition that saw wealth as God's reward for righteous living? Is he suggesting that those who share their goods find they have more than enough? It is hard to know. The twist in the tale is that they will do it hard: "not without persecution". It is likely that Mark is describing his own experience within a persecuted community of believers some forty years after the death of Jesus. The happy ones were doubtless those who took the risk of sharing their goods with those in need. Our lucky country has still to learn that lesson. Welcoming the stranger and sharing our wealth with the dispossessed may demand of us a simpler way of life. Who knows what blessings it will bring if we dare to take up the challenge?