

I don't know about you but I really feel for this young man in the gospel. He is a good man. He is sincere. Mark says that Jesus looked at him and loved him. This turns out to be a very sad line. It seems that the man cannot let go. I would say he doesn't really know who he is and so can't be honest and free. He lacks the gift of wisdom which the first reading talks about. He depends on external benefits to assure himself of his own goodness and worth.

Saint Paul, in one of his epistles, says the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. He doesn't say that money is the root of evil but the love of it. It leads to all sort of problems. Since love is a word used in too many ways, I prefer to say the desire for money is the problem. We desire so much because we are finite, incomplete, and keep searching for meaning. This desire, which is part of being human, isn't bad at all. Ultimately it is a desire for God. Life's journey, its mistakes, its pains and suffering, its rebuffs to our ego-driven wants, as well as our positive and intense love and pouring ourselves out for others, is part of human nature too that has the power to lead us to wisdom.

Desire is good, Desire helps us to grow. But, it appears from experience that desire in us humans is wounded. It easily goes astray and leads us to less than human goals. It can be expressed in consumerism where we feel the accumulation of things will satisfy our desire. It can be expressed in a need to control people and life. It can be expressed in the want of power. It can be expressed in the misuse of such gifts as pleasure and sexuality. Yes, desire is a wonderful force within us - but it is wounded.

Something deeper in us can expose the wound so we can live as scarred but healed human beings. I believe this is self-love. I don't mean narcissism. I don't mean an ego-centered heart that can't see beyond my own needs. No, self-love is something else. Jesus says we should love our neighbor as ourself. That has baffled me at times. Are we really to love ourselves? Yes, I believe self-love is something that scares us but is basic to loving God and others. The letter of John reads that we have not first loved God but God has first loved us. It is accepting this love. It is knowing we are loveable. It is in our faith in a God who loves us unconditionally despite our wounds, mistakes and sinfulness. We look at Jesus Christ, the human face of God, to see what this complete love means. To accept this love of God sets us free then, not only to love ourselves, but to love everyone else, to love our world, to love our life with all its ups and downs.

When I love myself, I accept that I am imperfect but I don't have to hide that. I am free to be myself. Then I am free to orchestrate my desires to be in harmony with God, with the earth, with the human race, with all the creatures of this world. I don't need things, the accumulation of things, nor power, nor control to know I am good and worthy. I don't have to earn this love. It is a free gift.

To be a disciple of Jesus is to accept a way to harmonize our desires into a unity of love that overcomes all divisiveness. As Saint Paul wrote, there is no separation or distinction between Jew and Greek, pagan and God-fearer, between male and female. We are all one in a many colored diversity. Relationship is the code of all life. We can let go of separation, superiority, being better than others, being exclusive in our religious, national or ethnic group. We can relax and be ourselves. Yes, being human means experiencing both joy and sorrow, good weal and suffering. There is great joy in being a human being in union with all other human beings. But there is also pain at times.

May we all let go of any shame and guilt feelings in our life. Yes, we have made mistakes. We could have done some things better. To accept myself as I am now is to love myself as I am, the way God loves me.

If you want to know some facts about news, the weather, dates or happenings, you can consult Alexis or Siri. If you want wisdom, go to Jesus. The way of Jesus is the way of standing amid all delight, joy, contradiction, ambiguity, division, complexity, with a heart and faith big enough to somehow hold it all. Jesus' way is the way of holding things. It is the way of true love. God is love. Let us love each other as God loves us and as we love ourselves.

**Timothy J. Joyce, S.T.L., O.S.B.**