

## Homily for 28<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Year B

### Vigil Mass, 10<sup>th</sup> October 2015

On my sabbatical in Jerusalem, the group I was with were one day exploring the Old City and we passed a Russian Orthodox Church, Saint Alexander Nevsky. We paid our five shekels and went in. Inside we discovered a wall, which is said to be the outside wall of the city of Jerusalem in Jesus' time. Within this wall there was a gap, perhaps two or three large blocks of stone in height and one block wide. One tradition is that this was the "eye of the needle" to which Jesus refers in today's gospel.

One of my colleagues, a big man, well over 6ft and broadly built, tried to get through. And he managed it but it was a tight squeeze He had to crouch low a force his body through by twisting and turning. If he had been encumbered with baggage and possessions, he would not have made it. This is the situation of the rich young man. He was attached to his possessions and wealth and couldn't let go of them. Jesus looked at him and loved him and invited him to be a disciple, to share Jesus' life. What an invitation Jesus was making to him. Even so the man's attachment was so great that he could not accept the invitation.

Today, our attachments could be financial; they could be material possessions or attachments of another nature, perhaps to a way of life or to our own private habits and inclinations which we do not want to give up. Whatever our attachments are, they can prevent us from fully accepting Jesus invitation to follow him on the way which leads to paradise.

The Rule of Saint Benedict has something to say about this. St Benedict talks about the vice of possessions; he actually calls possessions a **vice**. Vice is a very strong word; the Police have a Vice Squad; this conjures up rather grim and seedy images. St Benedict talked of possessions as a vice because they are preventing us living fully our Christian community life. This is why he says that a monk should not have anything of his own. So none of the 20 or so monks living at Worth have a cheque book nor a bank account. Everything we have is owned in common, we have clothes, books, pens, mobile phone, laptops and PC's even, as we need them "for our use". This doesn't of course stop us thinking of them as our own. A monk once put up a notice "Who has taken my umbrella?" Someone crossed out **my** and wrote over it **OUR!**

And in Lent we make out an inventory of everything in our possession or in our cells (monastic bedrooms) and offices. We include the roles and responsibilities we have in the Community also, as we could become attached to a particular job, a niche where we have become very comfortable. This is called a Poverty Bill; in drawing this up we are asked to reflect on whether we really need these items,; so many handkerchiefs, socks, pullovers, whether we have used them in the last 12 months and to consider carefully

whether we should give these away to someone more deserving, someone who needs them or return them to community use. This is a very good discipline and it underlines the freedom and the liberation in not having possessions, although, like the young man, we could be sad to part with a favourite garment.

But having no possessions or attachments does not automatically give you an entry pass to the Kingdom. If so, all the monks here would be laughing. The renunciation of possessions is one step, the first step, which enables the next step, which is to follow Christ.

So today we are invited to drop our attachments, be they financial, or wealth of possessions, habits or even relationships, anything which prevents us living fully the Christian life.