



SAINT LOUIS ABBEY



Homily for 15 October, 2006

By Father Timothy Horner

It is always **risky** to have dealings with nuns. It starts with 'good morning, sister' and then 'good morning, sister' with a smile, and then, perhaps, 'good morning, sister,' with a smile and 'do you think the Cardinals are going to win? Some time later sister says, 'Oh Mr X, or Mrs Y, or Miss Z, you know so much about baseball; we are looking for someone to teach our littlest girls how to catch a baseball: do you think you could spare an hour on Saturday morning to help us? And later still, 'Oh Mr X, you were such a help, and you did it so well, and all the little girls loved you. Do you think you could take them on for the rest of the season?' And before you know it, you're the volunteer coach and Athletic Director for the whole of their grade school.

Of course that is an exaggeration, but there is a risk especially when dealing with good and generous people, because they may expect everyone else to be as good and generous as themselves.

I wonder if the Rich Young Man experienced something like that with Jesus; perhaps he did not realize how **risky** it was to do what he did.

It's an interesting little dialog between him and Jesus. There is never any tone of voice, nor indication of expression in a written text, therefore one has to imagine. We are told that he **ran** up (rather than walked), knelt down (rather than stood), called Jesus 'good teacher' (rather than just 'teacher').

Did Jesus find this a bit fulsome, a bit obsequious? Did the man appear to be seeking a pat on the back? Jesus' reply seems cool, even chilly, or was 'why do you call me good?' a real question hoping to elicit the answer 'you are the Holy one of God? It could be, but I doubt it.

But then as the dialog continues, Jesus seems to see there is more in the young man than appeared at first, 'I have kept all these since my childhood' and then '**Jesus looked at him with love**' (and here's where the risky part starts: '**there is one thing more**: go sell what you have . . . and come and follow me' and 'he went away sad'. What a contrast with those whom Jesus called 'and **at once** they left their nets', or their seat of custom, or whatever, and followed him.

There is a Catholic legend that after his refusal everything went wrong for the rich young man. He lost all his money, resorted to stealing to keep up appearances, was caught, condemned to death, and ended up on the cross, the one next to Jesus and was the man we know as the good thief. That is only a legend, but whether it is true or not, we can draw two conclusions from it:

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- Never say no to Jesus;
- The thief's wonderful last chance must reflect those words 'looked at him with love'.

Is there a possible **risk** for us? There is indeed a risk in a close relationship with Jesus just as there is in any close human relationship. The two most likely ways to such a relationship are prayer and reading the word of God. Let's just take reading the word of God, which more and more people are doing.

Read this gospel through several times, remembering what our second reading says about the penetrating power of the word of God, and intending to apply the reading to yourself – we believe there is always something in the readings that speaks individually to each of us. What penetrates our heart?

For some it may be '**one thing more**' (what is the one thing for me?)

For others, '**Go sell all you have**' (a call to frugality, even poverty)

Or, '**We have left everything to follow you**' (a call to priesthood or religious life)

But note that if you choose "**One thing more**", don't take fright: it's unlikely to be as drastic as Jesus' call to the young man. Ask Jesus and trust him. Adequate grace and strength will come with any call.

So there are truly risks for us. Are they worth it? Indeed they are. The reward is infinite: we fall in love with the Lord, or more deeply in love, and we recognize his love for us. Of course, he has always loved us, but we become more vibrantly aware of his love. What greater reward can there be than that?