

Pastoral Reflection
28th Sunday in Ordinary Time

In our first years of formation as School Sisters of Notre Dame, Mark's story of the man who asked Jesus what he needed to do to inherit eternal life was interpreted to assure us that we had chosen the life style this man had refused. Our choice as Women Religious showed that we had made the "right choice" while the man in the Gospel had failed. We had given up everything to follow Jesus. That interpretation of this passage is certainly inadequate from a hermeneutical standpoint. But beyond that, by my third month in formation, I questioned its veracity. What had I given up? As I looked at family and friends, I realized that I had more security and earthly riches than many of them had. Our lives were simple, but we did not lack essentials.

This passage has continued to make me uncomfortable. So, I tried to avoid thinking about it. I was able to get a good education. I had what I needed for teaching. When I lost employment, I did not have to be unduly worried about food, shelter, and other necessities while I looked for another position. I live in a very small apartment, not very luxurious, but I have more than I need. I take a lot for granted.

This passage continues to make me uncomfortable. When I left leadership as a Provincial Councilor in the St. Louis province in 2011, I gave up a lot: a large sunny office (most of my professional life as a Director of Religious Education was done from a medium-sized closet), administrative assistants and other employees, a corporate credit card, knowledge of the internal workings of the province, a special connection with Sisters, a close relationship with other members of the leadership team, and similar "blessings." But I remember saying I could let go of all of that, but I would not let go of my smart phone. That was a non-negotiable. A friend asked if I was choosing between Jesus and my phone. I thought about that. My response was, does it have to be either/or. I tend to prefer to see things as both/and. I kept the phone – and Jesus – in my life.

While this passage in Mark still causes me discomfort (we have so much more than most people in the world), I hear Jesus calling us *in this time and place* to examine what we do and what we have that keeps us from responding to Jesus' challenge. Can we put to good use what is available to us, but still keep Jesus clearly and firmly in the center of our lives? If what we are doing or what we have, gets in the way of faithfully living the Gospel call to love and compassionately care for all creation, including each person we meet, then we must let it go. Letting go and following Jesus is what matters, *is all that matters*. We can continue to pray for one another that we respond *freely* to Jesus' call, "Come follow me."

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