**27th SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**

In today’s Gospel our Lord is cautioning all of us about undue attachment to and reliance upon anything other than on God. In today’s Gospel, specifically the example given is of a young man who is too attached to his wealth. If he relied more on God, then his greatest treasure would not be his gold and silver, but instead his first love and the true treasure in his heart would be God. He would then be the same as one who possesses nothing. It is necessary for our treasure to be God and not anything earthly. God must be number one in our hearts. Only then can the road to the Kingdom of Heaven be opened to us. In such a case, riches would not hinder this young man, but they in fact would help him, for they would provide the means for charitable works. If a person is wealthy. What a blessing it is to have more, so that we can share more and give more to those who are in need. But whatever we have, even if it is little, whatever we give has great value, if it is given freely with love and sacrifice. Every time we give it is like we made a mortgage payment on our home in the Kingdom of Heaven. In the Gospel of Luke it says, : “He looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury and he saw a poor widow put in two copper coins. And he said, ‘Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them; for they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all the living that she had.’” So to give unto salvation does not mean to give merely what is extra or left over, but true giving involves sacrifice

          The Lord’s shocking statement about giving everything away challenged the rich young ruler to put his relationship to God first. Likewise, we should use the prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and other spiritual disciplines of the Nativity Fast, of Advent, to be shocked out of our conventional and shallow assumptions about what it means to share in the eternal life of the Holy Trinity.  For Christ was not born to bring us popularity, or whatever else the world calls success.
         The eternal Son of God became one of us for completely different reasons.  Out of his great love, He wanted to make possible for us what is impossible by our own power.   We may take pride in what we accomplish, but which of us can claim credit for our Lord’s birth?

There is no earthly prestige in a Virgin Mother giving birth in a cave to a baby who whose cradle was a manger.  The rich young rulers of the world cannot understand a Messiah whose human life begins in such lowly circumstances and ended on a cross. Jesus Christ’s birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension are not simple human accomplishments or rewards, but truly miraculous manifestations of God’s eternal life in our world of sin, death, and corruption.
            We prepare to receive Christ at Christmas by opening our hearts and souls to His salvation—by true repentance.  Both in our private prayers and in the sacrament of Confession which we should all take during Advent, we repent by honestly confessing our sins and asking for the Lord’s mercy, even as we resolve to make a new beginning in the Christian life.  Yes, we must cooperate with our Lord’s mercy and grace by doing what we can to live faithfully. But even the best life does not somehow earn heaven. In fact, the more we grow in holiness, the more we will begin to see clearly the gravity of our sins and how far we are from the full stature of Christ.  The closer we grow to Him, the less we will think of salvation as a reward for good behavior according to a check list.
           So let this Advent be marked by humility, repentance, and spiritual disciplines for us all, not because we have broken a law, but because we have room to grow in our relationship with Jesus Christ.  Our hearts and souls are not worthy of Him. We do not serve Him in every poor and suffering person. We do not seek first His kingdom and righteousness. We are not perfect as our Father in Heaven is perfect.  But unlike the rich young ruler, we must not give up in despair. Instead, we should say, “Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” For what is impossible with men is possible with God. Amen.