

My Brothers and Sisters,

The reading from Hebrews proclaims that “*the word of God is living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword.*” This passage is a powerful reminder that God’s word challenges us. Before Pope Francis visited, I suggested that “the Old Testament prophets challenged the beliefs, values, and actions of God’s people.” Likewise, Jesus’ “teaching and example challenged the beliefs, values, and actions of the people of his day.”

The Scriptures challenge not only our behavior and lifestyle but also our values and even our core beliefs. To respond to God’s challenges, we have to allow ourselves to be challenged. For example, during his pastoral visit to the United States, Pope Francis more than once challenged us to remember that we are a nation of immigrants. He also challenged us not only to protect the environment but also those who have been marginalized or excluded. He challenged us to “to commit ourselves to the conscious and responsible care of our common home.”

In today’s reading from the Book of Wisdom, King Solomon praises wisdom. The wisdom Solomon praises, however, is not ordinary human wisdom borne of our knowledge and experience. Solomon praises God’s wisdom. If we are going to respond to God’s challenges, we, like Solomon, need to ask God for the gift of wisdom, one of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. In one of his general audiences, Pope Francis defined the gift of wisdom as “seeing with God’s eyes, hearing with God’s ears, loving with God’s heart, directing things with God’s judgement.”

In today’s Gospel, the rich young man asked Jesus what he needed to do to inherit eternal life. In his response, Jesus offered three concrete challenges to the young man. First, Jesus challenged him to keep the commandments, specifically the commandments that refer to our relationships with others. However, when the young man told Jesus that he had kept all these from his youth, Jesus challenged him at the core of his being, “*You are lacking in one thing. Go, sell what you have, and give to (the) poor and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.*” This encounter of Jesus with the rich young man suggests three truths.

First, keeping the Ten Commandments is necessary but not sufficient to inherit eternal life. Second, in challenging the rich young man to sell everything and give to the poor, Jesus challenges us to live with less. In his book *The Four Signs of a Dynamic Catholic*, Matthew Kelly quotes Mother Teresa and Archbishop Fulton Sheen. Mother Teresa once said, “Live simply so that others may simply live.” Archbishop Sheen said, “Never measure your generosity by what you give, but rather by what you have left.” Finally, in challenging the rich young man to follow him, Jesus challenges us to follow him. Following Jesus, living and loving as Jesus lived and loved, is the biggest challenge of all.

My brothers and sisters, the rich young man’s encounter with Jesus did not have a happy ending: “*...his face fell, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions.*” However, Pope Francis constantly reminds us that the Church must accompany people on their journey of faith and life wherever it takes them. We must not reject or abandon them. In his talk to the bishops in Philadelphia, Pope Francis suggested that if we, as Church, continue to patiently reflect God’s love, then “for every rich young man who with sadness feels that he has to calmly keep considering the matter, an older publican will come down from the tree and give fourfold to the poor, to whom, before that moment, he had never even given a thought.” In other words, the door did not close for the rich young man. Today’s *no* might become tomorrow’s *yes*.