

TWENTY-EIGHTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (YEAR B)

October 10, 2021

Wisdom 7:7–11 • Hebrews 4:12–13 • Mark 10:17–30

I.

Members of the parish staff roll their eyes when I tell them, only half-jokingly, that *The Hunt for Red October* is the greatest novel ever written and the greatest movie ever made.

Tom Clancy wrote *The Hunt for Red October* in 1984.

At the time, he was working at the insurance agency he owned.

He was writing novels in his spare time, including *The Hunt for Red October*.

A movie starring Sean Connery, based on the book, which had become a bestseller, premiered in 1990.

There's a scene in the film I like very much.

Captain Marko Ramius is commander of a new, top-secret Soviet nuclear submarine: the *Red October*.

Ramius has decided to defect to the United States, and he's bringing his crew with him.

Early on in the story, Ramius assembles the officers in the galley of the sub.

They know about his plan to defect—they're part of the conspiracy—but they don't realize that he's already notified the Soviet authorities of his intention.

While calmly cutting his steak,
 Ramius explains his irrevocable action by way of an analogy.

When the Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés landed in Veracruz, Mexico (1519),
 he destroyed 10 of his 11 ships—
 to motivate his men to advance on the Aztec capital.

There was no possibility of returning home,
 so the crew had to make the best of their situation.

II.

Today's Gospel is about leaving things behind—
 whatever gets in the way of following Christ.

That's the key to understanding Jesus' encounter with the unnamed man.

Christ tells him:

“Go, sell what you have, and give to the poor
 and you will have treasure in heaven;
 then come, follow me.”

Material wealth is certainly a danger,
 but Jesus' teaching concerns any obstacle to discipleship.

Today's Gospel makes it clear that heaven cannot be earned—
 but it can be lost:

“[The disciples] were exceedingly astonished
 and said among themselves,
 ‘Then who can be saved?’
 Jesus looked at them and said,
 ‘For human beings it is impossible, but not for God.
 All things are possible for God.’”

Discipleship is not about earning heaven.

Instead, discipleship is about accepting and receiving God's gift—
 saying, “yes” to God with one's whole life.

There are innumerable obstacles to discipleship.

Consumerism—unnecessary wealth—is certainly one of them, as it was for the man in the Gospel.

The Bible urges us to be careful with wealth because it promotes self-sufficiency, the sense that we don't need God.

Riches themselves are not the problem; some wealthy people are very generous with their money.

Other obstacles to discipleship include maximum comfort—being afraid of any kind of suffering or discomfort.

Another problem is expectations: the way we want life to be.

Oftentimes, we have unrealistic expectations: that everyone will agree with us, that life will be perfect, that there will never be any hardships.

These are difficult “possessions” to part with.

But letting go of things as we want them to be, and embracing life as it is, helps us to carry out God's will.

We become freer and more available to God, less likely to be paralyzed by doubt or fear or resentment or jealousy.

III.

The month of October is dedicated to the Holy Rosary.

This past Thursday, October 7, was the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary.

The Rosary is a meditation on the Gospel through the eyes of Mary, whom the Church venerates as the perfect disciple.

Mary became the Mother of God
because she was first the perfect disciple of the Lord.

What's significant is not only that God chose Mary from among all women,
but also that Mary responded wholeheartedly to God.

The words that Jesus speaks in today's Gospel
were the very words that Mary heard at the Annunciation, from the angel.

It's those words that prompt Mary's great act of faith.

(The Annunciation, by the way,
is depicted in the first stained-glass window in the nave,
on the left side, facing the altar.)

There, the archangel Gabriel reassures Mary:
"Nothing will be impossible for God" (Lk 1:37).

Mary's response indicates that she is selling all her "possessions,"
in the sense of whatever expectations she had—
plans for a normal life,
and perhaps personal dreams and aspirations.

Instead, Mary assents God's plan,
and welcomes Christ into her life:

"Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord.
May it be done to me according to your word" (1:38).

Mary left everything to follow Christ.

She leaves us the perfect example of faith.