

RELIGION COLUMN – OCTOBER 7, 2009

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I am a big fan of bookstores. As you can imagine, my first stop is in the Christianity section. After that I may move on to World Travel, or Science Fiction, or the Computer sections. Depending on how much time I may have, I have been known to wander all around the other sections in a bookstore looking at whatever is on the shelves.

There are a lot of books out there that deal with what is called ‘Self-Help’. Honestly, this speaks a great deal about us.

There are countless authors who are willing to help us help ourselves.

If it’s not a book, it’s an advertisement; or a talk-show; or a free seminar.

As a culture, one could get the impression that we are obsessed with self-improvement.

In all three synoptic Gospels, the story of the rich young man begins with the question:

“What must I do to inherit eternal life?”

This is significant, because, we can understand who this man is by the adjectives used to describe him.

He is rich – so it would follow that he has everything he needs and then some.

He is young – so it would follow that he has his health and the prospect of a long and happy life ahead of him.

As the story unfolds, it is revealed that he has observed and kept the Ten Commandments and the Mosaic Law. So he has done all the right things.

One can almost see him, as a very motivated individual; checking off the items in his list of things to do: Money? Check! Health? Check! Duties? Check!

Jesus, the Divine Physician, makes His diagnosis:

*"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."*

And the rich young man went away sad because he had many possessions.

This young man has everything anyone would need physically. He has done everything according to the commandments and the Law. Yet, Jesus sees that despite everything he has acquired and everything he has done – he is still lacking.

Having a relationship with God is not a matter of having or doing. In fact, everything we have and everything we do is a grace – a gift from God.

In the Liturgy, we have a prayer which says:

*Father, all powerful and ever-living God,
we do well always and everywhere to give you thanks.
You have no need of our praise,
yet our desire to thank you is itself your gift.
Our prayer of thanksgiving adds nothing to your greatness,
but makes us grow in your grace,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Everything we have, and everything we do is a gift from God.

So, instead of being something we have or something we do; our relationship with God is a matter of being.

Are we intimately aware of being a child of God? Do we realize we are children of a God Who loves us infinitely – that is, beyond our ability to comprehend? If we are somewhat aware of this — how is this lived out in our daily lives?

When we struggle with being God's son or daughter – when we struggle with living out the reality of our relationship with God in our day-to-day lives – what is it that we have or that we do that stands in the way?

This week, let us approach our Savior in prayer, and ask Him to diagnose whatever it is that we are lacking. Whatever it is that serves as an obstacle to our being the individual God has created us to be, and calls us to be. And with His grace, let us become who we were created to be – the person that we are called to be in Christ.