Guide in understanding the story of the Rich Young Man

Text used: Mark 10: 17 – 22; 23

Textbook: Called to Follow Christ in True Freedom 9; Sibs Publishing House

Audience: Intended for Grade 9 students

The Rich Young Man
17 And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” 18 And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. 19 You know the commandments: ‘Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.’” 20 And he said to him, “Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth.” 21 And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, “You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” 22 Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

23 And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” 24 And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, “Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God! 25 It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.” 26 And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, “Then who can be saved?” 27 Jesus looked at them and said, “With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God.” 28 Peter began to say to him, “See, we have left everything and followed you.” 29 Jesus said, “Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, 30 who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. 31 But many who are first will be last, and the last first.” (From English Standard Version: Biblegateway.com)

Questions to consider
Who are those involved in the story?
What are their preliminary actions?
What are the points to consider?
Why ask for the Good?
What is the Good?
How do we equate or determine the good?
When is Good good?
Can good be bad (not good)? How?
How do we understand the goodness?
Why is God the only Good?
Is Jesus against the rich?
Why was it said that the rich will have it more difficult?
What was Jesus’ analogy really means?
How much does it cost to follow Jesus?
Why was the man sad?
Are following the commandments enough to be good?

Narrative & Commentaries

Part 1: Correlation in our schema

After having discussed some fundamental concepts (sin, mortal & venial, original sin, Church, Jesus, Trinity, Baptism, confession, Bible, Decalogue) in relation to our study of Christian Morality as part of Christian Anthropology, it is important that these things are to be seen and understood in the precepts of a Christian in the light of the Catholic teaching. If otherwise, then our approach had been for naught. Since we all share in this gift of Christianity, it is only right and just to understand who we are named after. If therefore we claim to be Christians, then we claim that we are for and of Christ, the one and only. And that we believe the words of our forefathers, who have witnessed and experience this truth, that Jesus is indeed the Christ. Hence, to be able to fully grasp the essence of our faith, it should be our duty to know who Christ is, if not the same then as close as possible to those faithful before us, to become truly who we claim to be, Christians. The question now is how to we know Christ? It would be easy to dispose of this question and put it aside by simply saying, “read the Bible.” If so, do we really understand what we are saying? Is our precept of ‘reading the Bible’ enough? Or is there something else that must be in which will lead us in a comprehensive and faithful way of reading the Bible? This might be so, then let us go back to our primary question ‘How to know Christ?’ and simplify it by asking how do we understand the phrase ‘to know,’ and this perhaps can be applied to any person that we claim to ‘know.’ Anthony de Melo made it quite simple in distinguishing the two facets of understanding ‘to know’ in his snippet about “To Know Christ” (can be found in your book, page 10).

Before we talk about this two facets of knowing, let us first distinguish the relationship of becoming who we claim to be, Christians or as followers of Christ and of knowing Christ. The question here then is between knowing and following: do we follow first or know, or know then follow? Indeed, this would seem a rhetorical question and one that is often misunderstood. Most often and is the logical way of answering this question is to know first the person before you follow. Yes, indeed, for who would want to follow a person who would turn out to be a complete idiot? We are then forgetting something quite important and that is the process in which we would know a person. Naturally, you will have to be with the person to be able to know the person. In way, you have already followed the person in the process of knowing the person. So then, is following the first? Contrary to that. For if you would follow at first it is but an inevitable consequence that you will get to know the person. It would then seem that the consequence of following is knowing thus making following first, but it is not. You see, the vocation of a person to follow another is because he or she wants to know that person, and to keep on knowing the person is to keep on following the person. Thus we have created a loop of following and knowing. The vocation to know is personified through following, whose consequence is to know, then sustained by following, driven by the vocation to know, and so on. By this we can say that following and knowing happens at the same time (see parable of the tenant), thus the question ‘what is first’ is technically irrelevant but may not be so if not asked.

Now the two facets of knowing or to know. The way we understand this word is tangled, as is portrayed in “To Know Christ” where the convert claims to know Christ and yet when asked if he knows where was Christ born or who were his parents, he said “I don’t know,” he claims to know, yet at the same time knows nothing. The word phrase to know must be put into context to be understood well which are: to know about the person and know who the person is. Simply put, the first is a superficial knowledge of the person in question and the latter is personal and deeper understanding of the person. It would be more distinguishable when spoken in our culture:alam and kilala. You would not say “Kilala ko ang bahay mo” (I know who your house is) but you say instead, “Alam ko kung saan ang bahay mo” (I know where your house is); similarly, “Alam kita” (I know you) would seem funny and at the same time apprehensive in which should be corrected by saying “Kilala kita” (I know who you are). Alam
then has a deeper degree of knowing than **alam**. This then would lead us to another question of how do we claim to know the person “makilala ang isang tao”.

This time I would be referring to the most common answer among students and generally the people alike which is **experience**. We concretely say that one should experience another to be able to claim that one knows the other. By the word **experience** we mean to say that we ought to have a physical contact of the person we want to know (makilala) in all aspects as much as possible: we talk, we eat with, we play with, we sleep with, we bond with, we laugh with, we joke with, and we are with. This is indeed our way and is the best way to know (makilala) the person. But to have this with Jesus at this time an age and by its literal aspect would be problematic. You see it is because we cannot possibly and physically eat with, play with, sleep with, bond with, and laugh with Jesus. In addition, the convert in Anthony de Melo’s story claims that he stopped drinking alcohol because he came to know Jesus but literally speaking Jesus did not appear before him and say “stop drinking son,” it is his and by his own volition that he was able to stop drinking and yet still claim the latter. The question is, how was he able to claim such words?

I would suggest that to understand such claim is to relate it to our fundamental understanding of us as one people. We are called Christians and as Christians we are called Church: Church as it should be understood is the Body of Christ whose head is Christ and we as people partook of this body and so become the Body of Christ who should be Christ-like. Therefore, to experience Jesus in the most possible and physical way is to experience the Church. The convert in Anthony de Melo’s story was able to claim that he know who Christ is, is because he was able to experience where Christ is, in His Church.

**Part 2: Following Christ**

Now that we have expounded the possibility of knowing and of experiencing Christ it is now much easier to understand how to follow Christ. But before we go about singing alleluia let us answer first the meaning behind following Christ and also its cost. Just to say something about this cost; following Jesus has a cost in as much as if we would want to become someone then we would also avoid becoming someone else, we cannot be what we ought to be without being what we ought not to be. Moving on, following Christ can be better understood through the story of The Rich Young Man (*read above*). We will be analyzing the text part by part.

**A. The preliminary**

Jesus was about to go out the city therefore he was in the main road with all other people. The rich man *came running and knelt*. Meaning he first neglected his position as noble (rich people then are mostly of noble families) by kneeling even in the midst of all the people; second, the very act of running and kneeling implies that the person is sincere in his plea.

All this can be understood since the later text says that Jesus came to love the man.

**B. The Question**

> “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life” in some other translations “Teacher, what good must I do to gain eternal life” either way we can understand that:

1) He knows that Jesus is good or that his standard for goodness is Jesus or that he wants to know the good (who is Jesus) in a way, he wants to know what Jesus-like acts or acts that Jesus approves of

2) He wants to know the good to do the good

3) He also wants to gain eternal life

Each of this will be dealt with in the next part.

**Part 3. The Good, Doing Good and Goodness**

Let us determine first the Good. How can we say that something or someone is good? Or similarly, what is good for us? Whatever the answer is, is indeed good. But why do we search for these goods? What becomes of us in having these goods? Happy? Indeed we become happy, happy as in fulfilled whose opposite is not sad but rather emptiness. We are in search for the good because it fulfills us, makes us whole, and removes that emptiness – filling its space.

Just to say something about this *emptiness*. Emptiness is a broad subject on its own but let us just simplify our understanding by relating it to our very own experience: there comes a time when all acts seems to be pointless (especially during long periods of break) where playing video games becomes tiresome, chatting or texting even calling friends becomes boring, even eating becomes a hassle, heck even lying down becomes irritating. There is just nothing. Meaningless. Purposeless. There is just no point in doing things. You are alive but not living. Empty.

But even with all those goods that would fill up our emptiness, the emptiness will still be there to be filled. The good that we have come to know to be good will and definitely come to pass, it will end. Therefore, if the good we ought to have ends then it would become *not* good, not that it is bad nor evil but that which does not fill the emptiness it is meant to fill. With this proposition, a question comes to mind: when is good, good? Yet another rhetorical question but a necessary one. It is true that the good we seek is good in as much as it fills the space, but once it seize to do so then it seize to be good as well. The most plausible way of answering this question is with phrases, “it was good” or “it is good,” the first one being that the object had once become good or that it had once filled up that space in us and the latter being that the object is currently filling up the space. Hence if something cannot be good unless it has become good then everything else is neither good nor not good. It is *still*, Similar to any material object, for example a roll of tissue paper; by itself it is neither useful nor useless. It becomes useful when someone makes use of it; it becomes useless if even in the presence of that which can make it useful, is not used. The answer then to our rhetorical question would possibly be ‘was’ and ‘is’, but then if something is ought to be good, it has by itself good even with or without the presence of that which will make it good. So then, when is good, good? Good must be good whether it may be ‘was’, ‘is’ or ‘will’. If an object seize to be good at ‘will’ then it has become neither good nor not good and would require something that would make it good again. At last, if everything is neither good nor not good, all we can do is hope that something will be good.

Now that we have defined the good, let us now talk about Goodness before we even start to do the good for whatever we do might not be truly good. Goodness shall be understood as *that which makes it good or in way, the essence of the good*. The question that goodness answer is what makes good, good. Previously we have come to conclude that everything is neither good nor not good and that all we can do is hope that something will be good. But what makes us hope? If tomorrow is neither good nor not good, what makes us hope that it *can be good*? Simply enough, the answer is *that which can make anything and everything good* – us. We have the capacity to make everything else good. We can hope for the good of tomorrow because the one that can make tomorrow good can be there. In addition, since we ourselves are in search for the good, which makes us good and gives us the capacity to make everything else good. Though we further our understanding by asking, ‘what makes us search for the
good’ or ‘why is there emptiness?’ True, we are indeed incomplete, by ourselves we are and will remain incomplete. This is not because we are made to be incomplete but that we are made to be completed. A book is incomplete by itself and can only be completed once someone has used it as a book. And so we search for the good all because we are meant to be good, and is good because someone or something makes us good – our source of goodness, the source of all goodness, and we call him God.

Part 4: Doing the Good

From the previous part it had already been made clear how Jesus was able to say that God is the only Good. But let us now look into his reply on the rich young man’s question: after stating that God is the only good, he then goes on enumerating the commandments according to Moses. There are several thoughts that can be gathered from this, first being that Jesus enforces the law and that it should be done; second, Jesus intends to fulfill the law, to complete it; third, regarding the law, the whole law states the acts that should be avoided – evil acts. Evil acts are essentially acts that does not only not fill our emptiness but makes us empty and destroys the cause that makes good, good. The young man sincerely replied that he has done all of this and to add emphasis, he had been consistent ever since he had been educated about the law and so Jesus loved him. Jesus indeed loves those who kept the commandments (John 14:15), but then he said that in spite of this the man still is lacking in one thing. This one thing that the man lacks is emphasized in Jesus’ elaboration of giving up all what the man has and follow him. That very act of giving up and following is the good that must be done. Jesus had made it clear that if one wishes to be good, not only that he has to avoid evil but he has to be the good – the one that makes all things good: to be a source of goodness (Matthew 5:48). In addition to this, Jesus also speaks of leaving behind the rewards of avoiding the evil and we are not only to look for these rewards and live by it but rather to be the source of these rewards, a channel for the source of all goodness. And so, upon hearing the weight of achieving eternal life the man walked away sad.

Why was the man sad? Why was it mentioned in the following text that the reason he is sad is because he has a lot of wealth. Is having a lot of wealth an obstacle in achieving eternal life? Contrary. I propose a plausible reason: Jesus wants the man not only to live for the reward but rather become the cause of the reward for many. Remember, the young man’s question ended with “…to inherit eternal life”, he is clearly after the reward and is avoiding evil because there is a reward by doing so, and would like to do the good also because of the reward. Note that being similar to this man, a person who is only motivated by the reward, is not essentially bad; in truth there is nothing bad about being so, for Jesus came to love the man by being so. Though this kind of actuality is not enough, or is incomplete. Jesus reiterate this by saying, “You lack one thing”. This one thing that the person lacks is the very contradiction to what he wants, the reward. Jesus is telling the man that if he wants to truly inherit the reward he has to give up the reward, so that through him many may come to inherit the reward.

Lastly, Jesus is not against the rich when he mentions that it would be easier for a camel to enter the needle’s eye than for the rich to enter the Kingdom of God. Again, “not easy” is different from impossible, Jesus is only illustrating the difficulty of doing such a task (Luke 12:48). Indeed, this task is impossible through our own efforts but for the source of all things – God, everything is possible. Not that everything we do is useless, but that with God everything we do becomes useful.

Again, we humans, beings who search for the good, and as a consequence of this searching we become essentially good but may only be fulfilled by the source of all goodness, who is God.

*This is intended to be in narrative form so that the students may be able to practice drawing out their understanding by constructing a graphical organizer of all important details mentioned in the text above.*