



**Australian Catholic Youth Festival 2019
Homily**

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I don't know if anyone has ever counted how many times in the Gospels Jesus asks someone a question, but I think the number would be quite large. Jesus asks all kinds of questions in the Gospels and many of them are questions he might also be asking us. On one occasion, for example, he asked his disciples this question: *who do you say I am?* On another occasion he asked some of his disciples, *"What are you looking for?"* And once when he was approached by a blind man he asked him, *"What do you want me to do for you?"* It is a good idea, I think, whenever Jesus asks someone a question in the Gospels for us to wonder, *"Is he asking me the same thing?"*

Of course, Jesus is not the only person who asks questions in the Gospel stories. Some disciples in the early days once asked Jesus, *"Master, where do you live?"* On a different occasion the disciples asked Jesus, *"Why do you speak to the people in parables?"* And on a different occasion again, when Jesus encountered a man who had been born blind, his disciples asked Jesus, *"Master, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he should have been born blind?"* Sometimes the questions people asked showed they had not yet fully understood Jesus: sometimes that might also be the case for us as we ask all kinds of questions about our faith.

Many of us, at least some of the time, have many questions about our faith, about God and about what God is asking of us or offering to us. I would imagine that many of you came to this Youth Festival with many questions in your minds and hearts. I hope that some of your questions have been answered or at least that you can see a way forward to further explore your questions. Jesus was endlessly patient with people who struggled to understand him as long as they had open hearts and goodwill, and he will be as patient with us as he was with them. So keep asking your questions, keep searching for the truth, keep trying to discover a way forward in your lives, stay on the lookout for all the different ways God might seek to come to you.

Tonight I want to reflect with you on one of the questions Jesus was asked. We find the story in three of the four Gospels and in the different versions the person asking the question is described as a young man or a rich man or a rich young man. The question this person asked of Jesus was clearly very important to him: it came from his heart. It is, I believe, an equally important question for us. *"Good master",* the young man said, *"What must I do to inherit eternal life?"* In a sense



there could hardly be a more important question for us to ask of God than this. Jesus takes the young man and his question seriously, just as he takes us seriously. He gives the young man what at first glance seems like the standard answer but is in fact the true answer: *“You must keep the commandments.”* When the young man asks him which commandments in particular, Jesus mentioned three or four of the Ten Commandments given to the Jewish people by God on Mount Sinai.

Then the story gets interesting. The young man is able to say, I suspect probably with complete honesty, *“I have kept all these commandments since my earliest youth”*. What a good person this young man must have been! Not everyone in those days, and not everyone in our day, would be able to honestly say to Jesus, *“I have kept all the commandments since I was very young”*. A very beautiful detail is then given in one of the versions of this story. We are told that Jesus looked closely at the young man and loved him. Jesus could see the young man’s goodness and sincerity and he loved him for it. Over these days I am sure that Jesus has seen just as much goodness and just as much sincerity in so many of you and he loves you for it.

Jesus then says to this person, *“If you want to be perfect”* (that is, if you want to live fully the life you were created to live) *“then go sell all you own and give the money to the poor and then come and follow me”*. What a challenge this young man is presented with! What an opportunity for generosity and heroism! But then comes what I think is one of the saddest sentences in the gospels: *when the young man heard these words he turned away and went away sad because he was a person of great wealth.*

We do not know what this young man did with the rest of his life. Was he among the crowd in Jerusalem who eventually turned against Jesus and called for his death? Was he perhaps someone who regretted his decision not to follow Jesus and eventually found his way back to Jesus and to the Christian community Jesus had established? Did his refusal of Jesus’s invitation harden his heart and leave him imprisoned by his money forever?

We don’t know the answer to these questions and we don’t really need to know because the real question is not what happened to this particular young man. The real question is whether or not **we** are ready to accept whatever invitation Jesus is offering to **us**.

For the young man in the story the thing that prevented him from saying “yes” to the adventure of being a disciple of Jesus was his wealth and his inability to imagine his life without his money. That may also be the case for some of us here tonight but perhaps for many of us that is not what is holding us back. For us tonight the important and even urgent question is this: what is stopping **me** from giving **my** whole hearted “yes” to the Lord? This is a challenging question but if we are willing to ask it of ourselves and courageous and honest enough to really consider our answer carefully, then like the rich young man Jesus will be offering us the adventure of a lifetime.



So ask yourself this: If on my way home from the youth festival I encounter Jesus along the way and I pluck up my courage and go to him and say “*Lord, what do I need to do in order to live my life to the full?*” and he says to me, “*Keep the commandments*”, would I first of all be able to say to him, “*Lord, I have kept them all since I was very young?*” Maybe I would and if so that is a wonderful thing. But even if I can’t, and yet still want to ask Jesus to tell me what I need to do, and he turns to me and looks into my eyes and I know that he loves me, what will he say to **me**? “*If you really want to have the fullness of life then go and*” **what?** Sell all you own and give the money to the poor? Rethink your career choices and opt for something that perhaps pays less but contributes more to our society? Let go of the anger and resentment you feel towards people who have hurt you? Stop insisting on always having things your own way and start to accommodate yourself to the needs and desires of others?

There are so many answers to the question “*Lord what must I do?*” The answer Jesus gives to you will depend on your own circumstances and also on what it is that you hold closest to your heart but which is preventing you from being the person God has created you to be.

The key line, of course, in the answer Jesus gives to the rich young man - and it will be the key line in whatever answer Jesus gives to you - is this: *Come and follow me*. So don’t walk away sad from the opportunity Jesus holds out to you for an heroic life. Don’t walk away sad from the chance to make your life a wonderful gift to others. Don’t walk away sad from the chance to live your life to the full just as God intended you to when he called you into existence. Don’t walk away from Jesus: he is our Way, he is our Truth, he is our Life. He is alive, he is here with us, he’s calling to each one of us. Tonight, take the chance, take your courage in both hands, and open your hearts and your lives to him.