

Have you ever seen a paperback called the Book of Questions? It's a collection of conversation starters like, What was the last thing you stole? For \$10,000 would you let a dentist pull out all your teeth? Without an anesthetic? Would you do it for \$100,000?

Today's Gospel is held together by three provocative questions. Here they are: What must I do to inherit eternal life? Who can be saved? And what are the rewards of discipleship? Good questions, aren't they? And the answers are even better.

But before we look at the answers, please notice the assumption that underlies all these questions in this story. The assumption is that wealth is a sign of God's favor. Or, if you're rich it means that God loves you. Now, we know that's a false assumption--God loves the poor, too. But if you ever couldn't pay your bills, I'll bet you asked God, "What did I do wrong?" I'll bet your gut told you the same assumption: that wealth would be a sign of God's favor.

Here's how this story works: A young man comes to Jesus, and I'll bet what he's really busting to tell Jesus is that he's rich. But he beats around the bush and asks a marvelous question: What must I do to inherit eternal life? The answer he's expecting is that wealth will be a sign of God's favor. Then he can tell Jesus how wealthy he is. But Jesus' answer is a surprise: "Sell what you have, give the money to the poor, and follow me." It's not wealth that brings life, it's Jesus.

Question number two comes from the disciples. They ask Jesus who can be saved? They thought the wealthy would be saved, but he says it's as hard for them as for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle. Who can be saved? Jesus says everyone can be saved because it's God who saves, not wealth.

Question three is understood from the disciples' next complaint. "We've given up everything to follow you." Their question is, "What's in it for us?" What is the reward for discipleship, if it isn't going to be wealth? The reward is the enjoyment of this life and the next, and you don't need money for it. The rewards outweigh the sacrifices.

What must I do to inherit eternal life? I'll bet we'd all have different answers for that. Some might say, "I have to obey what the Pope says." Or, "I have to say prayers every day." Or, "I need privacy to think about God." Or "I need my family and my free time." All good answers. What's surprising is what Jesus says to the rich young man: You may not need what you think you need. And if you give up what you think you need you may still find eternal life, if you follow Christ.