

A college teacher once tried to help his class figure out their values. He called on a young woman named Marie. Marie was married. Between her and her husband they worked three jobs so they could support Marie's education and their newborn baby daughter Nicole. The teacher asked Marie, "Suppose I put a plank on the floor here and offered you \$100 to walk its length from one end to the other. Would you do it?" "Sure," she responded. "OK, suppose we took that plank to New York City and slung it between the towers of the World Trade Center. Would you walk across it for \$100?" "No way," she replied. "Would you do it for \$100,000?" She hesitated a moment, but said no. The teacher tried once more. "Suppose you were on one of those towers and on the other was a strange man with Nicole. And suppose he told you if you didn't walk across that plank, he would throw your child off the roof. Would you cross?"

Thanks be to God most of us won't face such a dramatic scenario, but we do face many questions in life about values: Is family more important than job? Is education more important than leisure? Is my love for others ever stronger than my love for myself?

When Jesus meets the rich young man, he forces him into a question about his values. The young man says he wants to inherit eternal life, but if it's at the cost of the riches he has achieved in this life, he's not so sure he wants it.

Few people take this Gospel literally. There aren't many who give up everything they own in order to follow Christ. Not even diocesan priests--we don't take a vow of poverty as many religious do. But we almost all do get this question from Jesus, "Are you willing to give up something you love in order to follow me? Are you willing to make me the most important thing you love? Will you admit you're wrong when someone else is blamed for your mistake? Would you drop a lawsuit out of love for your enemy? Would you care enough about pro-life legislation to march for it?" Jesus asks, "Will you still believe in me when somebody you love dies?"

Sometimes we discover we don't have the values we thought we did. We find our actions conflict with who we thought we were. Those can be times of remorse, but they can also be times for growth. If we don't have the values we thought we had, maybe we can grow into them.

The most important thing is to give the Holy Spirit a chance to work on us. We need time to think, to reflect on why we act the way we do. We need to pray, we need people we trust to reveal what's going on inside us. Do you walk across a plank to save the life of your child? Do you risk yourself in order to preserve your faith? The Holy Spirit will enlighten the hearts of those give him a chance to do it.