

One of life's great pleasures is "taking it easy" on a day off. Maybe it's a holiday like this past Monday – or just a "routine" day off from work. The pleasure can be extraordinary. Staying in bed as long as you want. Having something "special" for breakfast instead of the usual rushed, gobbled bite. Not having any meetings to go to, or any agenda to follow. Go ahead, admit it, it feels good!

Oh, but let's get back to that breakfast for a moment. Sometimes, we'd *like* to have a little something different – something special – but, because we didn't plan ahead enough to buy the ingredients, say, for those "favorite" banana pancakes, we have to go to "Plan B." An essential ingredient is missing.

Isn't it often that way in life?

We have plans, but cannot carry them out because of some kind of missing ingredient. We have the recipe, all of the "fixins" except one, but for lack of that one, we're left waiting in disappointment.

As disappointing as is a favorite breakfast that isn't made, I think you'll agree with me, it is even *worse* trying to put together a *life* when something is missing. No matter how well everything else seems to have come together, as long as we have that "something's missing" feeling about life, there is going to be a feeling of incompleteness.

One day a fellow ran up and knelt before Jesus and asked what it took to have a completed, full, and fulfilling life. Jesus ran through the usual list of ingredients, according to the traditional "recipe" known as the Ten Commandments. The man indicated he could check off each one. He had not broken a single commandment. And yet, there was a lingering feeling of incompleteness. The man must not have felt fulfilled.

Jesus perceived what his problem was. He had such a love of money – and such a *lack* of love for others – that his life was "missing something." And so, Jesus told him, "One thing you lack. Go, sell everything you have and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

Once again, Jesus addresses the nature of true discipleship. In the conversation with the young man, we are able to learn that a relationship with God involves more than just "following the rules." There is something to our faith that is more than just checking off the "do's" and "don'ts."

We may not, in our day, ask the question exactly the way this man did. We may not inquire about the ingredients necessary to “inherit eternal life.” We may couch it in terms of how to live a good life, or to be a person who makes a difference in the world. But we, like the young man, somehow have it in our heads that all it takes to please God is to “follow the rules.” How disconcerting it would be if Jesus were to tell us that *our* understanding of what it would take to please God falls short of what *he* had in mind.

For the young man who confronted Jesus, it was a matter of *priorities*, barriers to complete trust in God, an unwillingness to devote himself to caring for the poor, and a failure to go “all the way” in responding to the will of God for his life. What all that added up to was the missing ingredient of a total commitment to the ways of God. Nothing was to come between him and God in Christ.

For him, the thing that separated him from God, from a total dependence upon and devotion to God, was *money*. The man sought meaning and purpose in life through the accumulation of riches.

Sometimes, it takes a rich man to realize that. Let me share with you a little story. Henry Ford, I think you’ll all agree, was a very rich man. And yet, he seemed to understand something many less wealthy men never came to learn. One day, he had occasion to ask a young engineer about his ambition in life. The young man replied, “To become very rich; everything else is secondary.” Days later, Mr. Ford handed the man a package containing a pair of eyeglasses. Only he removed the glass lenses and placed two silver dollars in the frames. He asked the man to put on the glasses, and asked him, “What do you see?” “Nothing! The money blocks out everything!” Mr. Ford looked pensively at him and said, “Maybe you should rethink that ambition of yours.”

The young man in our Gospel this morning suffered from the same problem. He could see nothing but his wealth. He had convinced himself that he had everything he needed, but Jesus’ words hit him hard: “You lack one thing...” Of all people, would he not have felt he had all the ingredients in the recipe for a good life? No wonder he was “shocked and went away grieving” at the realization he could not pay the price. His *deficiency* was his *abundance*.

How many of us think we “have it all?” How many of us have become so self-reliant, so independent, we don’t give God – or others – so much as a thought? In order to “have it all” we need to let go of those things which block our relationship with God and

with others. Otherwise, something will *always* be missing from our lives, and we will be missing out on the abundant life Christ offers.

Is there a “missing ingredient” in your life? Maybe it’s not the same “missing ingredient” as it was for this man. But, in 21st century America, chances are some variant of this man’s problem is ours as well. And what do we say? Do we “go away grieving?” Or do we find an alternative – a way to have the life Christ offers?

I suggest that, for many of us, the “missing ingredient” is *generosity*. We’ve been acculturated, in our modern society, to “take what we can” and (to quote an old beer ad) “live our lives with gusto.” But is “taking all we can” the way to “gusto”? Jesus says not. And, actually, the biblical formula is not nearly so demanding as this (admittedly exaggerated) story would indicate. God does not demand that we give *everything* away. He only asks for the *first portion*. The rest he lets you keep. Not really that hard at all – and yet, oh what a difference it makes in our living out our discipleship!

People who have discovered the joy of giving away “off the top” instead of “off the bottom,” have discovered that it can be a lot more rewarding to live the generous life than it ever was to “keep it all” for ourselves.

What’s *your* missing ingredient? What keeps you from wholeness – completeness? From the full relationship with God and others God calls you to have? Over the weeks to come, beginning All Saints’ Sunday, we’re going to be dedicating ourselves to thinking and praying about that. But I’m going to suggest that today’s Gospel gives us a “head start.” It gives us something to be praying about even as we leave here *today*. And, if you find your thoughts and prayers changing how you think – and how you act – let me suggest one more thing if I may: You may very well discover that it makes a wonderfully rewarding difference in your life.