

(English translation)

Rocca di Papa, 30 December 1979

## Word of Life

**"It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of God" (Mt 19:24).**

Maybe you knew him. His name was Eletto. He was a tall, handsome, intelligent and rich young man. When he felt God's call to follow Him, he did not think twice even for an instant. Neither did he look back. It seemed that his riches did not exist for him at all. He gave everything away. While he was performing an act of love by trying to save a drowning boy, he met his death in a lake. He was only 33 years old. On that spot there is a memorial stone with these words written on it: "I chose God alone, and no other things besides."

Certainly, when Eletto appeared before Jesus, he did not hear these words being repeated to him:

**"It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."**

What about you, are you rich? Do you find this sentence striking?

I think you have reason to be perplexed and to wonder what would be the best thing to do. Jesus didn't say anything by chance. It is therefore necessary to take these words seriously, without wanting to water them down.

Let's try to understand their real significance from Jesus himself, from the way he behaved with the rich. He frequented the company of people who were well off. To Zaccheus, who had given away only half of his possessions, he said, "Salvation has entered this house."

Furthermore, the Acts of the Apostles show us that in the early Church the practice of holding goods in common was entered into freely, so that completely renouncing one's possessions was not compulsory. So it's not that Jesus had thought of founding only a community of people who are called to follow him, like Eletto, by leaving behind all their wealth....

And yet he says:

**"It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."**

So what is Jesus condemning? Certainly not the goods of this earth in themselves, but the rich person who is attached to them.

Why? The answer is clear: It is because all things belong to God, while the rich behave as if all things belong to them.

The fact is that riches can easily take the place of God in the human heart. They blind the vision and make it easier for all sorts of vices to take root. The Apostle Paul wrote: *"Those who want to be rich are falling into temptation and into a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires, which plunge them into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is the root of all evils, and some people in their desire for it have strayed from the faith and have pierced themselves with many pains"* (1 Tim 6:9-10).

Plato already affirmed: "It is impossible for an extraordinarily good man to be at the same time extraordinarily rich."

What, then, should be the attitude of people who have possessions?

They must have a free heart and be totally open to God, so that they feel that they are administrators of their goods, and know that - as Pope John Paul II said - they carry a burden of social responsibility.

Since earthly goods are not bad in themselves, we should not despise them, but we must use them well. It's our hearts that have to be detached from them, not our hands. We should know how to use them for the good of others. Those who are rich, are rich for the good of others.

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You might say: "I am not really rich, so these words are not meant for me."

Be careful. The question that the Apostles asked Christ in amazement right after this statement was: "Who then will be saved?" This clearly tells us that Christ's words were in some way addressed to everybody.

Even someone who has left everything to follow Christ may have their heart attached to many things. Even a poor man who curses anyone who touches his belongings may be seen by God to be "rich."

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Chiara Lubich