

According to one tradition, the “eye of the needle” referred to a gate in the wall of Jerusalem. During the day, there was a large gate that was open through which a camel could easily pass. But at night, the larger gate was closed and there was a smaller opening in the center of the gate that allowed people to pass through. A camel, however, could not pass through that smaller opening unless it got down on its knees, had its load removed from its back, and then crawled through. In referencing this story, Saint Anselm states that “the rich should not be able to pass along the narrow way that leads to life, till he had put off the burden of sin, and of riches, that is, by ceasing to love them” (Catena Aurea). So is it possible for a camel to enter through the “eye of the needle” and, therefore, a rich man to enter into Heaven? Yes. But only under the condition of being on their knees, humbling themselves, and ridding themselves of the “baggage” of their riches.

For those who are truly rich in the things of this world, this Gospel passage may be difficult to read and reflect upon. It was spoken in reference to the rich young man who asked Jesus how he can enter into eternal life. Jesus’ answer was “go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.” At that, the rich young man went away sad because he was clearly attached to his wealth.

Jesus’ explanation above, however, should give hope to anyone who struggles with this high expectation. The disciples were truly troubled by what Jesus said, and that is why Jesus followed up by saying, “For men this is impossible, but for God all things are possible.” For God all things are possible! This statement of fact should be carefully pondered and believed by anyone who struggles with being overly attached to material riches. It should also be noted that one can be attached to riches even if they do not have riches. The desire for more is the attachment that needs to be cleansed, not the actual possession of riches. In fact, it is possible to have many possessions and not be attached to them at all. This is the beauty of poverty of spirit. But be careful not to presume that you have perfected this beatitude too quickly. Jesus’ statement above was said out of love for those who are overly attached to the things of this world. So if this is you, be merciful to yourself and pay close attention to Jesus’ words and your own interior struggle with this.

Reflect, today, upon this clear and unambiguous statement of Jesus. “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.” Do you believe this? Can you accept this? Is Jesus speaking to you through this passage? Again, even if you are materially poor, is your desire for riches strong? If so, this passage equally applies to you. Allow this passage to sit within your heart in a prayerful way and try to be as honest as you can with yourself as you read it. Do not hesitate to choose the true riches of Heaven over the passing things of this world. In the end, the value of spiritual wealth infinitely outweighs anything you possess for your short time here on earth.

Lord of true riches, You desire that each of us be filled with spiritual wealth that is infinitely greater than anything we could obtain in this world. Please free me from my attachment to material wealth so that I can live free from that burden. Help me to see the value of the treasures of Your grace and mercy and to make this true wealth the single focus of my life. Jesus, I trust in You.