

August 18, 2008
Monday of the Twentieth Week in Ordinary Time

Readings of the day may be found on the following link:

<http://www.nccbuscc.org/nab>

Ezekiel 24:15-23

Deuteronomy 32:18-19, 20, 21

Matthew 19:16-22

Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

The words of Jesus today bring to mind the many attachments I have in my life. I have repeatedly felt the nudge to simplify, simplify, simplify. I tend to hang onto things, especially books and family items that hold memories. There is certainly nothing wrong with this practice, except that I have a difficult time letting go of them. Sometimes I wonder if I own them or if they own me. Every so often something prompts me to begin to let go. Recently I put a bag in my closet and made sure that I put one item each day into the bag to be given away. I ended up with 3 bags of clothing to give to Goodwill. It felt good, but for some reason, the practice fell by the wayside. Recently I read an excerpt from a conference on spiritual discipline where the author encouraged the participants to give away or throw away 27 items each day for 9 days. There is something about those numbers that make a big difference for me. It is a much more radical letting go. I found myself bargaining with myself—maybe I can make it 5 things for 3 months or 10 things for 1 month. I would pick up an item and then put it down and walk away. This challenge has stirred something in me, I did not know exactly what it was until I read today's gospel. If I really commit to this practice, it will lead me to confront letting go at a deeper level. It would no longer be a game or a challenge to purge or a good way to clean out the clutter, it would become a stripping of all that gets in the way of complete surrender. It would begin with things and move on to attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and so on. Does knowing this and hearing the words of Jesus make it easier? No. But it does make the words of the gospel today very personal.

*The only things we can keep are the things we freely give to God.
What we try to keep for ourselves is just what we are sure to lose.*

C.S. Lewis