Written by Chiara Lubich
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"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

Does this sentence make a certain impression on you?
I think you may have reasons to be perplexed and to consider what would be the best thing to do. The words of Jesus are never used loosely. It is therefore necessary to take these words seriously, without trying to water them down.
Let us try to understand the real significance of these words from Jesus himself, from his way of behaving with the rich. He frequented the company even of well-to-do persons. To Zaccheus, who had given away only half of his possessions, he says: "Salvation has entered your house."
Furthermore, the Acts of the Apostles show us that in the early Church the communion of goods was practiced freely and, therefore, the concrete renouncement of one's possessions was not compulsory. Therefore, it is not that Jesus thought of founding a community only of persons who are called to follow him by leaving behind all they possess.

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."

What does Jesus condemn, then? Certainly not the goods of this earth in themselves, but the attachment to wealth by the rich.
Why? The answer is clear: it is because all things belong to God and the rich behave as if their riches are their own.
The fact is that riches 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).
Even in earlier times, Plato already affirmed: "It is impossible for an extraordinarily good person to be at the same time extraordinarily rich."
What, then, should be the attitude of people who have possessions?
They must have a heart that is free and 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 "are mortgaged to society."

Since earthly goods are not bad in themselves, we should not despise them, but we must use them well. We must keep our hearts detached from them, not our hands. Because whoever is rich, is so for the good of others.

"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."

But perhaps you'll say: "I am not really rich, so these words are not meant for me."
Be careful. The question that the dismayed Apostles asked right after this statement of Christ was, "Who then will be saved?" This clearly tells us that Christ's words were somehow addressed to everybody.
Even someone who has left all things to follow Christ may have his or her heart attached to so many things. Even a poor person who curses at anybody who touches his or her belongings may be looked upon by God as a "rich" person attached to earthly treasures.

- Chiara Lubich

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From the Focolare's beginnings, Chiara Lubich wrote her commentaries on each Word of Life, and after her death on March 14, 2008, her early writings are now being featured once again. This commentary was originally published in July 1979.