

SPIRITUALITY

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

cf. 2 Cor 8:9

R⁷. Alleluia, alleluia.

Though our Lord Jesus Christ was rich, he became poor,

so that by his poverty you might become rich.

R⁷. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Luke 16:19-31; L138C

Jesus said to the Pharisees:

“There was a rich man who dressed in purple garments and fine linen and dined sumptuously each day. And lying at his door was a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who would gladly have eaten his fill of the scraps that fell from the rich man’s table. Dogs even used to come and lick his sores.

When the poor man died, he was carried away by angels to the bosom of Abraham.

The rich man also died and was buried, and from the netherworld, where he was in torment, he raised his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side.

And he cried out, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me.

Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am suffering torment in these flames.’

Abraham replied,

‘My child, remember that you received what was good during your lifetime while Lazarus likewise received what was bad; but now he is comforted here, whereas you are tormented.

Reflecting on the Gospel

As we continue to journey with Jesus to Jerusalem we hear another parable unique to Luke: the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus. This parable develops many themes in the gospel, including the right use of money from last week, and also the reversal of the social order that has been foretold in Mary’s canticle: he has lifted up the lowly and sent the rich away empty.

We should find this story troubling for a number of reasons, not least of which is that those of us in the developed world are likely the rich man, dressed in fine clothes and eating well while there is a Lazarus effectively at our doorstep who needs our help.

When examined from a global perspective, most human beings live on meager amounts each day. Most of the wealth in the world has been localized, and even if we are not part of the infamous “1 percent” we are likely among the top 25 percent globally. Indeed the annual median wage globally is about

\$10,000. So if we are looking to place ourselves in this parable, the person of the rich man is likely where we belong, generally enjoying the good things of this world while others go without, or go with less. The line on Abraham’s lips sounds the toll of doom: “My child, remember that you received / what was good during your life-

time / while Lazarus likewise received what was bad; / but

now he is comforted here, whereas you are tormented.” A reversal is in order!

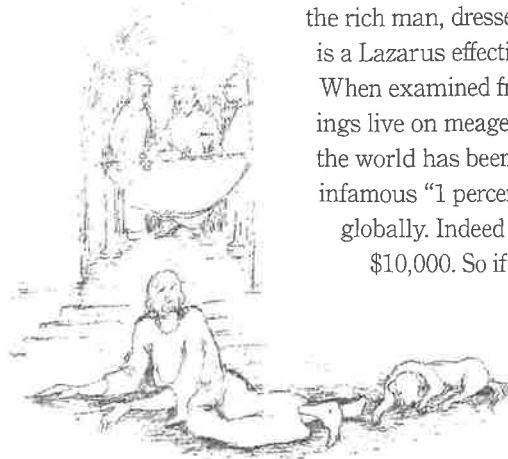
The message that Jesus preached was good news for those on the outside of power, privilege, and wealth. Those who enjoyed such things put him to death!

In the nether world, the rich man cries out for someone to warn his brothers. But the message of caring for one’s neighbor is spread liberally throughout the Law and Prophets. In a telling sign, which foreshadows the situation of the early Christians, Abraham says ominously that people will not learn even if someone rises from the dead.

The lesson is difficult and likely hits home now that globalization means someone an ocean away is our neighbor. While we may no longer see a poor Lazarus literally at our doorstep, he is there nonetheless, and can be seen with television, radio, internet, and other modern means of communication. But it would be a mistake to believe that the only Lazaruses are an ocean away. There may be a Lazarus picking vegetables for meager wages and no health care nearby. There may be a Lazarus working in unsafe conditions creating the latest technological device. And there is certainly a Lazarus overlooked by systems, institutions, and even churches. What is our response? We have been told by the Law, the Prophets, and even by someone who rose from the dead to care for them.

Living the Paschal Mystery

For many, Christianity has become a comfortable societal institution. Parishioners and church members attend Mass regularly, build community with others in their geographical boundary, and might even send their children to the parish school. Today’s gospel is a reminder that Jesus did not found parishes. The basis of one’s salvation is not parish membership, but how we treat the poor and disenfranchised among us. And now that our world has become flat, we are so interconnected that nearly the entire globe is our neighbor. Our responsibility



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to one another has increased exponentially. No longer are we concerned merely with our neighborhood, parish, or school, but we are concerned with a much broader spectrum. The moral life includes decisions we make while shopping, hiring labor, or disposing of waste. With today's reading, we are called to let go of any narrow vision we might have of "neighbor" and see the Lazarus figures before us both locally and worldwide.

Focusing the Gospel

Key words and phrases: There was a rich man . . . And lying at his door was a poor man named Lazarus.

To the point: Where most parables deal with everyday objects and stock characters like farmers, travelers, or a woman baking bread, today's parable, the Rich Man and Lazarus, is distinctive in that it contains two first names. The rich man could be any person enjoying an extravagant lifestyle while others suffer but the poor man is *Lazarus* and when he dies he is carried to the bosom of *Abraham*. We're not given many details about Lazarus's life other than his poverty, his hunger, and his illness (sores). We don't know if *Lazarus* lived an upright life, how he came to his current state in life, or if he had any friends or family. But we are given a name. This man, lying at the rich man's door, is not just a poor person, a person in need, he is *Lazarus*. Perhaps if the rich man had crossed the chasm of social class that separated him and *Lazarus* in their earthly life he wouldn't have found himself staring across an even greater chasm in eternity. Who are the ones in need at your door? Do you know their names?

Connecting the Gospel

to the first and second readings: As in last Sunday's first reading, the prophet *Amos* condemns the rich who show no care and compassion for their neighbors in need. The ones that *Amos* berates are not only rich but one could say, obscenely wealthy, lying on "beds of ivory," and drinking "wine from bowls." The rich man who ignores *Lazarus* would be at home in their company with his "sumptuous" dining and fine linen clothing. In many ways the role of the prophet is to point out the nature of God, especially when the behavior of people is not in line with the Creator in whose image and likeness they were made.

to experience: In all three readings today, *Amos*, *Jesus*, and *St. Paul* us to think not merely as humans, intent upon our own comfort, but with compassion and love of God. *Jesus* tells us, "[L]ove your neighbor as yourself" (*Mark* 12:31; NABRE). When we love this way we cannot be content to enjoy the riches we have, because when others are poor and suffering,

Connecting the Responsorial Psalm

to the readings: *Psalm* 147 reads almost like a litany recounting the actions of the Lord. These actions on God's part turn the world upside down and the blind are freed, the blind can see, the lowly are raised up, and the most vulnerable are protected. In the first reading and the gospel, *Amos* and *Jesus* condemn those who profit from the status quo—the ones who lounge on ivory couches at sumptuous feasts while their neighbors suffer in poverty.

to psalmist preparation: As God's children we are called to act as God. How does your lifestyle oppress others, especially in ways you don't intend? How might you become more like the God of today's psalm, intent upon caring for the vulnerable?

PROMPTS FOR FAITH-SHARING

Psalm 147 recounts the actions God takes in response to suffering and injustice. In the face of these situations God gives, frees, raises up, loves, and protects. What place does social action have in your faith life?

St. Paul exhorts *Timothy* to "pursue righteousness, / devotion, faith, love, patience, and gentleness." Which of these traits do you find most difficult to embrace? How might you focus on building up that trait this week?

In his apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, *Pope Francis* states we must allow ourselves to be "evangelized" by the poor. Have you experienced this type of evangelization in your own life? How might you open yourself up to this experience?

Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time, September 29, 2019

Gospel (cont.)

Luke 16:19-31; L138C

Moreover, between us and you a great chasm is established to prevent anyone from crossing who might wish to go from our side to yours or from your side to ours.' He said, 'Then I beg you, father, send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers, so that he may warn them, lest they too come to this place of torment.' But *Abraham* replied, 'They have *Moses* and the prophets. Let them listen to them.' He said, 'Oh no, father *Abraham*, but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' Then *Abraham* said, 'If they will not listen to *Moses* and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone should rise from the dead.'"