

26th SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME, CYCLE C

Amos 6: 1a, 4-7 + Psalm 146 + 1 Timothy 6: 11-16 + Luke 16: 19-31

Holy Spirit Catholic Church: September 29, 2019

In this parable, Abraham informs the rich man suffering from eternal torment that his brothers back on earth have "*Moses and the Prophets*" to guide them to repentance.

If they will simply heed these instructions from Sacred Scripture, his brothers will be saved.

"Moses" is shorthand for the first 5 books of the Old Testament, called the Pentateuch, The Jews of Jesus' day attributed the authorship of these 5 books to Moses. In these 5 inspired books, over and over again the people of Israel are reminded that those who have, have been given what they have, to share with those who have not. Three special categories of people are identified to be cared for in a special way: the widow, the orphan, and the stranger (also referred to as the "alien in the land").

The prophets challenge the people to care for the poor and remind them that not doing so will ultimately lead them away from God and into exile.

Every year on the Friday after Ash Wednesday we hear the text from Isaiah stating that if we want God to hear our cries, then we need to listen to the cries of the poor and attend to their needs. (Isaiah 58: 6-9)

Today and last Sunday the Church challenges us with the fiery words of the prophet Amos.

Last Sunday Amos warned those who trample upon the needy and destroy the poor of the land

and this Sunday his warning is directed against those who seek only their own comfort and disregard the needs of others.

The living Word of God, which cuts like a sword to the very essence of what is important, is very clear--- God is for the poor and God's people must be so as well. Like a mother who pays special attention and takes extra special care of one of her children who is in greatest need, so is God when it comes to the poor.

The Word made Flesh, who is the Son of Mary and Son of God, is also for the poor. We have heard numerous times in this year of the Gospel of Luke how Jesus is for the poor.

In his inaugural address at the beginning of his ministry in Luke, Jesus proclaims: “*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor.*” (Lk 4:18)

He then goes on to reach out to heal those who are hurting, to lift up those hungering for God’s mercy, and to teach by way of parables about God’s special concern for the poor. Think of the Good Samaritan who helps the man who has been robbed and left half-naked and practically dead on the side of the road, or the impoverished prodigal son who comes back home penniless and in tatters.

At the end of last week’s parable, Jesus warned that one cannot serve both God and mammon (Lk 16:13).

Immediately after that statement and a little before today’s parable about Lazarus and the rich man, Luke states: “*The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all these things, and sneered at him.*” (16:14).

So to them Jesus addresses the parable of the great reversal, the parable of the Rich Man and the poor beggar, Lazarus.

The consequences are clearly spelled out for ignoring the cry of the poor at one’s very own door.

Note that Jesus does not condemn the rich man for his wealth, but because he does not share anything of his abundance, not even a scrap of food, with Lazarus. Jesus ate meals with those who were rich, and his ministry was supported by the generosity of several well-off women. (Lk 8: 2-3)

What is important is what one does with God’s gifts, and the warning from Jesus is that riches can blind one to the needs of others.

Also note that he does not propose a program for combating world-wide poverty, but challenges his followers to put his words into practice by first of all helping the one in need on one’s doorstep, at one’s front door.

We must not forget, either, that Jesus was not only for the poor but that he became poor that we might become rich in God’s grace.

Born in a stable far from his home, he soon became a refugee on the run from the murderous wrath of King Herod.

Jesus traveled around the countryside preaching and teaching, depending on others to support him and his merry band of followers. He died without a single possession to his name, naked on the cross.

The Son of God was poor and he was for the poor.

The real sin of the Rich Man in today's parable is that he was blind. He allowed his riches to blind him to the person of Lazarus at his door. His self-centeredness also caused him to be deaf to Lazarus' cry for mercy.

The challenge, then, is to ask the Lord Jesus to heal our blindness and help us to see the human dignity of the poor at our door. To ask him to open our ears deafened by the screed of individualism and see how we are connected, how we are to be in solidarity with those who suffer in any way.

Too many people treat the poor person or the immigrant or the refugee as a problem instead of seeing them as a human being with inherent dignity, deserving our respect and love and care.

Too many people in our own land see the poor as a threat to our security or our material wealth instead of as a God-given opportunity for us to do what we have been commanded to do: share our bread with the hungry, give shelter to the homeless, let the oppressed go free.

St. Vincent de Paul, whose feast day was this past Friday, wrote the following: *“Even though the poor are often rough and unrefined, we must not judge them from external appearances nor from the mental gifts they have received. On the contrary, if you consider the poor in the light of faith, then you will observe that they are taking the place of the Son of God who chose to be poor.”*

As our St. Vincent de Paul Conference continues this saintly man's work, they operate on the same principle, going two by two to visit those who cry out for help, to hear their story, and to treat them first of all as a fellow human being, and to see even deeper the Son of God crying out for help.

This practice of “encounter,” which Pope Francis teaches frequently, changes the equation.

When we can encounter the one in need as our brother or sister, as one like us, and see in them the face of Christ, everything changes.

We want to share what we have, and we do so joyfully and generously.

But as long as we wall ourselves off from the poor, we can be as blind as the Rich Man.

As long as we build barriers between “us and them”,

we become as deaf as the Rich Man was to the cries of Lazarus.

Fr. Joseph A. Jacobi