

Deacon Steve's Reflections on the Sunday Readings
September 29, 2019 – 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Amos 6: 1a, 4-7 Psalm 146: 7-10 1 Timothy 6: 11-16
Luke 16: 19-31!



James Tissot, 1890. The Rich Man pleads with Abraham.

***Father Abraham, have pity on me.
Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water
and cool my tongue.***

“Though our Lord Jesus Christ was rich, he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.” (Gospel Acclamation – 2 Corinthians 8: 9)

Throughout the Gospels, but especially in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus emphasizes our duty to the poor, the vulnerable, the marginalized, the refugee, the stranger, and all those in need. In the *Sermon on the Plain* (see Luke 6), which is similar to the more well known *Sermon on the Mount* in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus boldly preached: *“Blessed are you who are poor, * for the kingdom of God is yours.”* In today's Gospel reading, Jesus shared the well-known *Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus*. Some may remember it as the story of *Dives and Lazarus*. We do not know the rich man's name, but “Dives,” used in some translations, simply means “Rich Man.” The poor man, Lazarus' name means, “God comes to help.” The parable is a powerful challenge for all of us in how we treat those less fortunate. If we are to be the Disciples of Christ, we must serve all men and women, especially those who are most in need.

In the parable, the rich man does not treat Lazarus badly. He is not acting with evil intent. In fact, he may treat others with decency, especially those within his circle of family and friends. He does not persecute Lazarus, he does not actively harm him; rather he treats him with indifference! He ignores him, turns a blind eye to his need and even to his presence. When both men died, the angels carried Lazarus to the bosom of Abraham (the place where the righteous go in consolation to await the Kingdom of God). The

rich man, in turn, died, was buried and was in Hades (the place of eternal estrangement), where he cried out to Abraham in torment across the great chasm for even a drop of water. 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.”* The rich man realized the error of his ways, but too late. Ironically, had he paid attention to Lazarus – God comes to help – he might have been saved.

Who is our Lazarus? Do we recognize those who may be the instruments of our salvation? Quite simply, Lazarus is all around us! In some cases, the poverty is physical – the person begging in the street, the homeless, those who are in pain and suffering, as well as those who, for whatever reason, are outside the main of society. At other times, the poverty may be spiritual, where the signs may not be as visible. These are the men and women who are alone, in despair and loneliness, those who in their invisible suffering cry out to be heard or to experience the simple joy of recognition and friendship. How do we treat them? Do we act with compassion and decency to alleviate their suffering, even for a moment? Or do we simply turn our heads away, so that we do not see them, lest it distract us from our “business.” The truth of the matter is: it is our business! Christ healed the sick, cured the lame and the blind, and gave comfort to those afflicted with demons. As his Disciples, we can do no less.

Lazarus – God comes to help – is the bridge that spans the great chasm between salvation and damnation. We must cross that bridge in this life, through acts and deeds of mercy and kindness, to offer glory to God and demonstrate that love by how we treat our fellow man. It need not always be in great things, but rather in the small acts, that we develop our discipleship. We cannot change what we have done yesterday, we cannot control tomorrow, rather, we can only act today, and each day, in accordance with the Gospel message. In this life, we can turn from indifference to consolation. As we heard in today's Responsorial Psalm: *“Blessed is he who keeps faith forever, secures justice for the oppressed, gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets captives free.”*

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