Thursday of the Second Week of Lent

Gospel text (*Lk* 16:19-31): 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 (...).

"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, '(...) 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.'"

Jesus, crucified and resurrected, is the true "Lazarus"

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(Città del Vaticano, Vatican)

Today, we consider the final part of the "Parable of the Rich Man and the poor Lazarus". From Hades the rich man tells Abraham what many men, then and nowadays, would like to tell God: if you want us to believe in You, then you must be clearer; send us someone from the afterlife who can tell us that it is indeed as You say.

Asking for proof is a constant along the whole Gospel. Abraham's answer, as well as the one from Jesus, is evident: those who don't believe in the Scripture Word will neither believe in someone who comes from the afterlife. The ultimate truths cannot undergo the empirical evidence. Let's think about the resurrection of Lazarus in Bethany: miracles do not lead to faith, but to the hardening of hearts.

—Jesus —crucified at the city gates, exposed to mockery— is the true Lazarus sent by the Father: to believe in Him and to follow Him is the invitation of this parable, which is more than a parable.

The doctrine of the Purgatory in the "Parable of the rich man and Lazarus"

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Today, Jesus admonishes us through the image of a soul destroyed by arrogance and opulence, who has created an impassable chasm between himself and the poor man; the chasm of being trapped within material pleasures; the chasm of forgetting the other, of incapacity to love.

In this parable Jesus is not referring to the final destiny after the Last Judgment, but is taking up a notion found, inter alia, in early Judaism, namely that of an intermediate state between death and resurrection, a state in which the final sentence is yet to be pronounced. There these souls are not simply in a sort of temporary custody but are already being punished or are experiencing a provisional form of bliss.

—This state can involve purification and healing which mature the soul for communion with God.The early Church took up these concepts, and in the Western Church they gradually developed into the doctrine of Purgatory.