

Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)

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. 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. 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.'"

“Now he is comforted here, whereas you are tormented”

Fr. Valentí ALONSO i Roig
(Barcelona, Spain)

Today, Jesus confronts us with the direct consequence of the social iniquity of the growing inequality between rich and poor. As if belonging to one of these awful scenes we are used to watching on TV, the Lazarus' story hits us, and achieves the sensationalist effect which prompts our emotions: “Dogs even used to come and lick his sores” (Lk 16:21). The difference is obvious: the rich man was dressing in purple and fine linen clothes, while the sores covering the poor man were his only dress.

But the situation is balanced when both die. And, it is now when the difference is reversed: one takes his place with Abraham; while the other, is simply inhumed. If we had never heard this story before and we would like to apply the values of our present society, we might reason that the one who reached into Heaven was the rich man and the poor one was logically buried in the sepulcher.

Abraham, the Father of the Faith, pronounces the sentence pointing out the final outcome: “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” (Lk 16:25). God's justice changes the situation altogether. God does not allow the poor man to remain forever in anguish, hunger and misery.

This message has moved millions of rich men's hearts and has converted large crowds through history; but, what kind of message will be needed in our over-developed, hyper-communicated, globalized world to make us realize all the social injustices which we are directly responsible for, or, if nothing else, which we tolerate as accomplices? Whoever heard Jesus' message desired to rest by Abraham's side, but how many, amongst us here, will have enough by being buried when dead, without wanting to receive the consolation of our Father in Heaven? The true wealth is getting to see God, and what we need, as St. Augustine asserted, is: “Walk with the man and you will reach God.” Let the Lazarus of everyday help us find God.

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

-

“Learn therefore to be poor and needy, whether you have anything in this world, or whether you have nothing. For you also find the beggar who is arrogant and the wealthy who humiliates himself. God looks on the inside.” (St. Augustinus)

-

Amid a culture of indifference which not infrequently turns ruthless, our style of life should instead be devout, filled with empathy, compassion and mercy, drawn daily from the wellspring of prayer.” (Francis)

-

“... The drama of hunger in the world calls Christians who pray sincerely to exercise responsibility toward their brethren, both in their personal behavior and in their solidarity with the human family...” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, n° 2831)