

## **26<sup>th</sup> Sunday OT – Luke 16:19-31**

### Lazarus and the Rich Man

The rich man in our parable from Luke about the correct use of wealth, is traditionally called Dives. The poor man at his gate was called Lazarus. Dives behaved like the wealthy folk in Amos; he was probably not even aware of the presence of Lazarus. He may have thought his wealth was a sign of God's favor as we read in Deuteronomy 28:2f, "When you harken to the voice of the Lord, your God, all these blessings will come upon you and overwhelm you." And if Dives knew his scripture well, he would consider the dogs that licked Lazarus' wounds a sign of God's anger with Lazarus, as we read in first book of Kings 21:19, "The Lord says: In the place where the dogs licked up the blood of Naboth, the dogs shall lick up your blood, too."

After his death, Dives learnt the truth. He now saw Lazarus clearly and discovered that he was a child of Abraham. Though his own life had ended with a proper burial, he found himself separated from God. Abraham told him that he could do nothing to cross the chasm; it was too late. They had failed to recognize Christ in the hungry and the naked. Their opportunity was past. They and Dives had had their reward already.

So far, the parable resembles traditional stories known from Egypt about the reversal of fortune in the next life. The final part belongs exclusively to the gospel. Dives asked that his brothers be warned lest they incur the same fate. He is given his answer: the warning is contained in the prophets, such as the teaching of Amos we heard this week and last, as well in the Psalm of today. He pleads with Abraham that this teaching is not enough; somebody must go back from the dead. Luke's reader knows that Christ has gone back from the dead. His life and resurrection have confirmed the teaching of the Prophets and the Psalms. Thus, Luke warns all the Dives who ignore the Lazarus in their own communities.

In *Give Us This Day*, St. John Chrysostom, writes, "It is worthwhile enquiring why the rich man saw Lazarus in Abraham's arms, and not in the company of some other righteous person. The reason is that Abraham was meant to reproach the rich man for his own inhospitality. Abraham used to pursue even passers-by and drag them into his home, whereas the rich man disregarded someone lying in his own doorway." St. John quotes from the

letter to the Hebrews, "Remember to welcome strangers into your homes, for some by doing so have entertained angels without knowing it."

When was the last time you invited someone into your home as a guest? Was it a stranger? If it was, did you invite the stranger person back? In today's society we have a great fear of *the stranger*. We begin to teach our children at a very early age to avoid strangers at all costs! Especially, do not accept candy from strangers, but even more, don't accept a ride. Even conversations with the stranger should be limited and only when one of the parents are present.

The chances of meeting someone like Lazarus on the sidewalk, let alone, in one's own driveway is quite rare. When I was in Africa, the stranger was no longer strange but a common occurrence. The problem was how to discern who in the long line outside one's door really had a legitimate problem? When trying to run a formation program where we trained young brothers as teachers for our schools that we ran in the slums, we had to do a balancing act of making sure we had enough money to run the school and set an example to the young men practicing charity to those who found their way to our door. We kept list of religious charities in the area where we could send the strangers, like the food pantries, the clinics, the orphanages, elderly care, etc.

One time I asked a young brother how his day went. He said it went well and that he really enjoyed working with the students at the slum in Nairobi. I asked him what his students were like? He said they were very eager to learn and that if I didn't beat them, they would say that I didn't love them. "And what did you say to that?" I asked surprised at their request for beatings. He said, "I told them that is not the Marianists way. One doesn't need to be beaten to show love." I was quite pleased with his statement. He looked hungry, so I asked him if he had eaten lunch today. "No," he said almost unconcerned, "I gave my lunch money away to a student." I was stunned and asked him, "Doesn't the school feed them in the morning before school?" "They do," he said, "but some might not have anything to eat in the evening. Several of us give them our lunch money." I told him, "You just showed your students how much you loved them by giving them your lunch money. That is truly the Marianist way!"

He said that he knew in the evening there would be a hot meal for me in community, but he couldn't eat his lunch knowing that many of his students would go hungry tonight."

I told him, "We are not supposed to feed the world. We can only help those around us in this life. But when our love grows to include others, like your students, sometimes it is better to go hungry and let your love for them feed you and you will always be satisfied even though you will be hungry. My mother taught me that, and she never starved to death."

As Christians, we are only expected to help those around us.