

ECHOING GOD’S WORD
in
THE CATHOLIC FAITH COMMUNITY
Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time
September 25, 2022

Lectionary Readings:

Amos 6:1,4-7
1 Timothy 6:11-16
Luke 16:19-31

Woe to the complacent.
The proper use of material goods.
The Rich Man and the Poor Man

Luke:

Luke would have us move on with Jesus on the road toward Jerusalem. There is no particular physical geography here. We do not know precisely where Jesus taught this Parable of the Rich Man and the Poor Man. More important than the physical geography is the spiritual or theological: On the way to the kingdom, the Church needs to be taught a lesson about the relative value of riches.

As long as we live and breathe, we have the opportunity to make decisions about our lives in this world which will have an effect, for good or for ill, on our lives in the next world. The story of the Rich Man and the Poor Man reminds us that the opportunity is *now* and not later.

The Rich Man (called *Dives* in some older English translations, from the Latin word for ‘Rich Man,’ *dives* not being a proper name) and the Poor Man (*Lazarus*, by name.) This Lazarus has a name; he has a God-given identity. This is the only person in all of the parables of Jesus who has a name. His name means “*he whom God saves.*”

Both the Rich Man and the Poor Man have an identical destiny: They die. Riches will not provide immunity from death, from an accounting in the next life, from the punishment due to those who have done wrong and not repented. Death is the great leveler. We are all equal when it comes to death. And we take only the death and resurrection of Christ, with the good deeds we done as Christians, on that great journey beyond our death.

There is no evidence from the text of the parable that the Rich Man had done anything wrong; for that matter; there is no evidence that the Poor Man had done anything right! The fact of being rich and the fact of being poor created a division between these two sons of Abraham, a division that should not exist between co-equal sons of the Covenant. The Poor Man had become invisible, like the poor of today. He probably lay at the Rich Man's backdoor. He had become part of the scenery. The sin of the Rich Man consisted in having ignored the needs of the Poor Man, in having allowed inequalities to develop between him and this poor person.

The bosom of Abraham refers to the realm where God lives in intimacy with the children of the Covenant. Avoiding the sacred name of God led to the use of certain substitutes such as “the Lord,” or using the name of God’s servant when referring to God. The *great chasm* indicates the absolute finality of death. There can be no going back. We cannot live our lives over again. We will reap only what we have sowed.

They have Moses and the prophets: Surely, the teachings of Jewish Scriptures are already loaded with warnings against the neglect and abuse of the poor. That should be enough. *Even if someone should rise from the dead:* The Christian community needed to hear that they are not paying enough attention even to the voice of the Risen Lord.

Amos:

The sins of ancient Israel have been called the “sins of civilization.” Evidence shows that the Northern Kingdom of Israel had become wealthy and quite sophisticated. Divine worship flourished at three shrines: Bethel, Gilgal and Dan. Nothing wrong there. Liturgical life was at its best and noblest. But, the rich *lay on beds of ivory* and paid little attention to the poor. Thus, the “sins of civilization.” A nation having become wealthy often ignores the less fortunate within its own bosom. Amos threatens divine retribution.

Timothy:

The Lectionary should have included the three verses that follow immediately after verse 16; it would have made it clearer that this whole passage is about the proper use of material goods. The early pastors of the Church are admonished by the author of these pastoral epistles (1 & 2 Timothy and Titus) to provide strong leadership for communities threatened by loss of its authentic spirit. These are now second and third generation Christians. Faithfulness to the spirit of Christ and of their now deceased Apostle Paul requires also that material goods be used for the greater glory of God.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Have you ever considered dedicating a portion of your talents, of your time, and of your income to God in some concrete program of giving, of volunteering, or of serving those who are in need? Is your charitable giving in any way based on your need to be grateful rather than on the needs of those receiving your gifts? Have you ever thought of the need to give a definite part of your income to the parish?
2. After nearly 20 centuries of Gospel preaching, why do you suppose the poor of the world are still so neglected? Can you think of a reason why the poor are still invisible in our midst? What can we do to make them more visible? What can we do to come to their aid in a more effective way?
3. Do you think the Church has any particular responsibility to use its collective resources to bring about some major change in the way the poor keep on being poor? What resources does the Church have when it comes to having an effective impact on world poverty? Do you think we are using our resources well? What should we do to influence the governments of the world in this regard?

SUGGESTION FOR CHRISTIAN ACTION

Decide on a simple project that you would like to undertake with your faith sharing group or with your family for the help of the poor.

PRAYER

BODY OF CHRIST, SAVE ME!

**Save me from my archenemy, my weak and faltering self.
Save me from all greed of money, of power, and of praise.
Save me from thirst for pleasure, worldly show, and midnight revelry.
Save me from betraying you, dear Lord,
in thought, or in word, or in deed.**

CATHOLIC DOCTRINE

Catholics in America are not well-known for their practice of stewardship of gifts. Other Christian communities have placed at the very center of the moral and religious duties, teaching the value and practice of returning to God a portion of God's gifts as a sign of gratitude. We Catholics have a difficult time communicating that message.

Perhaps because we have not been as Bible-centered as other Christians, we have not heard a consistent message about the nature and purpose of God's gifts to our lives. In a general and often vague way, we have been taught to give thanks to God every day for all of God's gifts. But, this form of giving thanks was often practiced as a verbal thanksgiving or a thanksgiving of prayer rather than of deeds. What to do as a visible sign of gratitude has not often been specified.

The theory and practice of Bible-based stewardship of gifts would have us *return to God* a portion of everything we have: personal skills and talents, energy and time, income and acquisitions. The chief motive for this practice lies in the need to express our gratitude to God in a visible and tangible way; to make *real* the feeling of thankfulness that is in our hearts. We want to take some of our God-given talents and dedicate them to God in the service of the Church or of some other people-benefiting endeavor. We want to devote some of our God-given time to the works of mercy, to helping others, to working in various ministries of the Church or in public service to worthwhile causes. The same applies to our treasure or our income.

Right off the top, before any deductions or before any other commitment is honored, a portion of what we have should be dedicated to God and given for the use of someone outside our own personal or family interest. This act of religious consecration of gifts is at the heart of the practice of stewardship.

Those who practice stewardship for religious reasons say that they consecrate all that they have been given by giving back a part of what is a gift to them in the first place. The remainder is still holy and brings holiness to all that we do with our lives: our time, our talent.