

Homily
Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time - September 29, 2019
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So why was the rich man condemned ... just because he was rich? Sacred Scripture names several wealthy men who were good and righteous ... some were friends of Jesus: Joseph of Arimathea ... Nicodemus. No ... wealth and possessions are **not** bad in themselves. What **is** good or bad is how they are used. Christ does **not** condemn the possession of earthly goods but He **does** condemn selfishness. And ... He condemns ... **indifference**.

Comfortable in his abundance ... the rich man did not even **notice** Lazarus. Oh, on some level he knew **about** him; he **could** see him every day. But he didn't; he saw **through** him ... because he was **insignificant** ... a **non**-person ... and so ... he ignored him. He was apathetic and self-absorbed ... so he was ignorant of and unconcerned about the needs of those around him. He had everything in this life ... that a person could want but ... but ... he had no compassion. His values were completely based on worldly possessions and wealth. And the only need he felt was to satisfy his own worldly appetites and pleasures.

Oh ... he could **afford** ... to be generous. The help Lazarus needed would never have been **missed**! He **could** have reached out. There **was** no ... un-crossable chasm. The **social** gulf which separated them could **never** have been crossed by Lazarus ... but it could **easily** have been **crossed** by the rich man at any time ... but it wasn't.

He had the **Scriptures** ... and according to the Law of Moses ... for a person of property ... **not** sharing ... with one in need was **unconscionable**. Leviticus stated that men of property were to be considered Yahweh's **tenants**: The ... land is mine, and you are but resident aliens. ... The wealthy therefore owed "**taxes**" to God's representatives... the poor ... and so ... according to **Isaiah** ... they were **expected** to share... their bread with the hungry and clothes with the naked ... and never to turn their backs on them Thus ... by Mosaic law ... the rich man was **obligated** to take care of Lazarus ... but he did not! Oh ...to be sure ... he did nothing **against** Lazarus; he just failed to reach out and share. He did nothing at all!

We see that very same indifference in the rulers and the wealthy of Israel ... and we hear the prophet Amos warn: "**Woe** to the complacent! ... They shall be the **first** to go into exile." ... Before the Assyrians invaded Israel ... these self-styled **elite** ... of Israel ... like the rich man in the gospel ... were rich, decadent, idle ... and completely insensitive to the needs of the poor who ... in turn ... were bitter and resentful. The people were polarized and had no cohesion and

so were an **easy** target for conquest. These idle rich cared only for their own pleasure ... even as they faced the destruction of their country.

They were like those Germans who saw what the Nazis were doing and did nothing ... as long as it did not affect them ... or perhaps like Americans who are not concerned or do not believe they are effected by our national disgraces of abortion, epidemic promiscuity, **and** indifference to poverty ... or like more and more of the world's richest countries today, turning their backs on the worlds refugees fleeing from persecution, war and poverty. But when we act with complacency or react with indifference to evil or suffering, **we** descend unto inhumanity. And it is so easy, so tempting to avoid such rude interruptions to our work, our plans, our well-ordered lives. It is awkward and troublesome to be involved. We want to say: "Don't talk to me about such things. They're unpleasant; they're depressing. And it's not my fault; I didn't make it that way. That's just the way things are! It's not my fault. I'm not responsible. Ah! If **only** ... that were true ... **but** ... Jesus gives us a very **different** message.

We live in a world ravaged by poverty and injustice, and it is clear from the words of Jesus that this is not the kind of world that God wants. God wants His people to be free of misery and want. This is the task He has given us. As Catholics ... as **Christians** we are called to work for justice... we are called to fight against poverty. This is a challenge. What Jesus calls us to is very countercultural. He asks us to be **giving** in a society where **having** is much more valued. The task He calls us to is nothing **less** ... than the building of His Kingdom on earth. But this does not mean that we have to take all the problems of the world on our shoulders ... singlehanded. As St. Oscar Romero said almost forty years ago: "... We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that. This enables us to do **something**, and to do it very well. It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning ... We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs. ..."

No ... we cannot do it all ... but our God expects us to do something! Compared to most of the people on earth we are wealthy. Even at minimum wage one earns more in a day than most in the world earn in a week. And we are so **very** comfortable but we must **never** ... become so comfortable that we forget the poor ... that we ignore injustice. Lazarus is at **our** doorstep too ... and he is knocking. We ... like the rich man ... also have Moses and the prophets. But we have something he did not have. Someone ... from the dead **has** come back to tell **us** ... Jesus Himself! Has it made a difference?