

26th Sunday in Ordinary Time: Growing in the Spiritual Taste for Charity and Eternal Destiny

Amos 6:1a,4-7; Psalm 146,8-9,9-10; 1 Timothy 6:11-16; Luke 16:19-31

Dear family and friends of the Co-Cathedral of St. Theresa Church,

Praise the Lord my soul!(Psalm 146:2)

What happens when we close our eyes to helping the poor and become indifferent to their plight? What happens when we ignore God's preferential love for the poor? The parable of the rich man and Lazarus spoken by Jesus poignantly provides a picture of an irreversible consequence in a state of eternal separation tormented with fire.

Our Lord is giving us a picture of two people: the rich and the poor. The rich man is living a luxurious life, wearing an expensive dress, eating and drinking the best food and wine. One can imagine he is enjoying a lavish lifestyle. In contrast, poor Lazarus lay on his doorsteps, full of sores, and waiting for the scraps from his table. Because Lazarus could not sit or stand, he didn't have the strength to keep the dogs away from licking his wounds. One can imagine his terrible state, suffering physically and mentally.

The message that our Lord Jesus pointed out from this picture is that God hears the cry of the poor, and it is not about being wealthy but what often comes with it. The words of Prophet Amos warn that when a person gains affluence and power in life, it is a temptation one may become extravagant in lifestyle; instead of increasing one's generosity. The person may even lose the spiritual taste to care for others and only see oneself (cf Amos 6:1-7). The prophet is speaking to us the obvious: when riches and power get into our heads, we behave as if we live forever, and like silver that covers the glass, it prevents the person from seeing and feeling the pains of the poor. It is depicted well in the parable that while the rich man was not mean to Lazarus nor drove him away from the doorsteps of his house, he failed to recognize Lazarus as his brother, a person starving and dying at his doorstep in need of his help. His indifference created a wall that separated him from the poor Lazarus.

Such indifference leads to a lamentable consequence-- the roles are reversed at death -- poverty is changed to wealth, and riches to misery. That is, Lazarus is now sharing the joy of heaven, while the rich man is suffering the torment of eternal separation from God (cf Lk. 19:24-26). It reveals to us the "Way of God" expressed in Mary's Magnificat (cf. Lk. 1:51-53). God upsets how mortals think and act: God reverses the status of mighty and weak, rich and poor. It is not the case that God despises the rich and powerful, but that God favors those whom the rich and powerful ignore or reject and that the rich and powerful are invited in God's mighty works in helping those needy and poor.

We are told that the rich man wanted to warn his five brothers of the sad consequence of an irresponsibly lavish lifestyle and unresponsive to the plight of the poor. Such a request involves those who listen to the story; the listeners are forewarned. We may listen to the story as outsiders and think we do not fit in the shoes of the rich man's family or Jesus' audience at that time; however, the warning is worth a personal reflection. There are always "poor Lazaruses" in our lives: those we distanced ourselves from, those we ignored to help, even those we refused to talk to and forgive; wherever we look, there is a sorrow to be comforted, wherever we are, there is a need to be supplied, and wherever we go, there is misery to be responded to, for our encounter with those in need and poor is also an encounter with Jesus Christ. The words of our Lord Jesus in the last judgment scene are quite telling. He says, "For I was hungry, and you gave me no food, I was thirsty, and you gave me no drink, a stranger, and you gave me no welcome, naked, and you gave me no clothing, ill and in prison, and you did not care for me." "Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me" (Mat. 25:42-46).

In the name of our Lord Jesus, our life of discipleship compels us to a loving response! It grows when we develop the spiritual taste for being close to people's lives. Like the roots of the plant to the soil, it grows when we are in union with Jesus; he loves us, he gave his life to save us; and now he is living at our side every day to enlighten, strengthen and free us, primarily through the Holy Eucharist. When we allow his love to reside in our hearts, we bring our behavior on par with our Christian dignity. St. Paul's exhortation in his letter to Timothy echoes this: "you, man of God, pursue righteousness, devotion, faith, love, patience, and gentleness. Compete well for the faith. Lay hold of eternal life, to which you were called when you made the noble confession in the presence of many witnesses" (1 Tim. 6:11-16). He urges Timothy and all of us to fully live out our baptismal promises.

The "little way" of our patron St. Theresa of Lisieux, fits well on this. Her "little way" is a loving response to Jesus — doing an everyday task, whether small or insignificant, with great love and always treating people with kindness.

I hope you are not tired of hearing this "little way" of our parish patron saint. I keep bringing it because holiness, a grace from God, is a natural result of consistently living her "little way." It is the most basic way of following Jesus and our journey to heaven. In her diary, "The Story of A Soul," she wrote, "Yes, I know when I show charity to others, it is simply Jesus acting in me, and the more closely I am united to Him, the more dearly I love my sisters."

God bless you!

Fr. Manny Hewe
Pastor