

HOMILY 9.25.2016

THE RICH MAN & LAZARUS

Two pastors were lamenting how small a voice they had in the community compared to the wealthy members.

“Money talks,” said the first pastor.

“True,” said the second pastor, “but the only thing my money says is ‘goodbye’.”

In his first letter to Timothy, St. Paul tells us that money is the root of all evil, right? WRONG! St. Paul tells us *“the love of money is the root of all evils”*. There is a BIG difference. Paul reproveth not the wealthy but the *lovers* of wealth! In fact, this is the verse just preceding today’s second reading from Timothy. St. Paul tells Timothy, “But you, man of GOD, avoid all this. Instead, pursue righteousness, devotion, faith, love, patience, and gentleness.”

We have all heard and we all know that we cannot take any material thing with us when we die. What we can take, what we should take, what we must take – is holiness. We become holy when we think more of GOD and others and less of ourselves. The result of this is LOVE – the one thing JESUS commanded us – *“Love one another as I have loved you.”* [John 13:34] Satan’s second biggest lie is Lie, cheat, steal – do whatever you have to – but get everything you can! [His biggest lie is that he does not exist!] Brothers and sisters – material gain is temporal. We Christians look to the eternal. This world is not our home. It is merely our dwelling place on our way to our home – heaven. What lies the world tells us! Wealth will make you happy; sex, drugs, alcohol will make you happy; a new car or a new home will make you happy; an Xbox1, PS4 or Nintendo Wii will make you happy. NO thing can make you happy. Only GOD can do that. As St. Augustine famously said 16 centuries ago, *“You have made us for yourself, O LORD, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.”*

This world is a mess! Hatred and division. Lying and cheating. Greed and avarice. Pride and envy. Gluttony and sloth. All of the seven deadly sins.

This is nothing new. 750 years before the birth of Christ, the prophet Amos lamented how the wealthy of his time abused the defenseless and wined and dined while the poor languished. In today’s Gospel we heard the familiar story of the rich man and Lazarus. However, it was not the rich man’s wealth but his callousness toward the poor that plunged him into ruin. We see the same thing in the Gospel. JESUS tells the story of the rich man who dines sumptuously every day while the poor man, Lazarus, *“who would gladly have eaten his fill of the scraps that fell from the rich man’s table.”* Wealth, in and of itself, is not a bad thing. Much good can be done by wealthy people but if your

love is for wealth and not for GOD and not for others then you are on the road to perdition! As we heard last week, *“No servant can serve two masters. He will either hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and mammon.”* The rich and powerful are visited with woe and exile not for their wealth but for their refusal to share it; not for their power but for their indifference to the suffering at their door. In the world of the prophet Amos, in the world at the time of JESUS and in today’s world, the rich and powerful make a name for themselves and dine sumptuously, while the poor remain anonymous, refused an invitation to their feasts. But notice in today’s Gospel, the LORD knows Lazarus by name while the rich man has no name.

This brought to my mind the story of JESUS and the rich young man. In Matthew’s version of the story, the rich young man approaches JESUS and asks: *“Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?”* JESUS responds: *“If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.”* He asked him, *“Which ones?”* And JESUS replied, *“You shall not kill; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; honor your father and your mother’; and ‘you shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”* The young man said to him, *“All of these I have observed. What do I still lack?”* JESUS said to him, *“If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to [the] poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”* When the young man heard this statement, he went away sad, for he had many possessions. Then JESUS said to his disciples, *“Amen, I say to you, it will be hard for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven.”*

Please note based on his response, the rich young man had behaved well. He had obeyed all the commandments and even *“loved his neighbor as himself”*. He was likely considered a “good man”. But even he recognized something was missing. What? Perfection. To enter the kingdom of heaven we MUST become PERFECT. Recently, these verses from St. Paul’s letter to the Romans echoed in my head: *“I urge you brothers therefore, by the mercies of GOD, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to GOD, your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to the world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you might discern the will of GOD, what is good and perfect and pleasing.”* (Rm 12:1-2) Mediocrity might be satisfactory in this world but it will not be in the next!

Prior to and since the canonization of Mother Teresa of Calcutta on September 4, many of her words have been haunting me. These words in particular: *“A life not lived for others is not a life.”* And these: *“Holiness does not consist in doing extraordinary things.*

It consists in accepting, with a smile, what JESUS sends us. It consists in accepting and following the will of GOD.” How do we follow the will of GOD? We can start by performing one of the Corporal Works of Mercy.

1. Feed the hungry.
2. Give drink to the thirsty.
3. Clothe the naked.
4. Visit the imprisoned.
5. Shelter the homeless.
6. Visit the sick.
7. Bury the dead.

Let me read one more verse from the 6th Chapter of Paul’s First Letter to Timothy that was omitted in today’s reading. *“Tell the rich in the present age not to be proud and not to rely on so uncertain a thing as wealth but rather on GOD, who richly provides us with all things for our enjoyment.”*

I’d like to give Mother Teresa the final word: *“Whoever is dependent on his or her money or worries about it, is truly a poor person. If that person places his or her money at the service of others, then the person becomes rich, very rich indeed.”*