

[Readings: Amos 6:1a. 4-7; Psalm 146; 1 Timothy 6:11-16; Luke 16:19-31]

One comic strip that I am particularly fond of is Garfield the Cat. There is a great humor in those sarcastic witticisms of his. I like his take on depression. It is a four-panel cartoon, which only has him resting on his arms, looking out to the viewer. In the first panel, he sighs and says, "I'm down." Second panel: "I'm really down." Third panel, "Down, down, down." Fourth panel: "Down doobie-doo down down..." (from the song "*Breaking Up is Hard to Do*").

One of the comic strips points to our Gospel today. One cold winter night, Garfield is sitting on the living room couch, looking out the window. He sees Odie the Dog peering through the window, nose pressed against the glass, scratching to get in. Garfield thinks to himself: "This is horrible. Here I am in the comfort of a warm house, well fed, and there is Odie outside begging to get in, cold and hungry. I can't stand it anymore. I just can't stand it. I've got to do something." So he goes over to the window... and closes the curtains!

Rather than dealing with the needy, some of us have simply chosen to close the curtains. All of the rich people in today's readings lose their futures not through their riches, but by the lack of concern for others less fortunate, which ultimately results in lack of concern for their own eternal fate. Where can YOU be more attentive to others, especially those most in need now, before it's too late?

"Charity begins at home," the saying goes. That's also where it ends, for folks who draw the circle of responsibility with a short radius. Some of us terminate our focus of concern on only our own. Others may extend it briefly to include elder relatives, close personal friends, or grandchildren who are in financial need. For those with a cultivated sense of community, generosity might be extended through the neighborhood, parish, village, or tribe. We reach out very generously here at St. Martin's to the poor. Thank you all for that. And for being an example to others of generous stewardship. We are not all lost!

In this regard, the rich man at his sumptuous dinner didn't owe poor Lazarus a thing. By Jewish law, it was Lazarus' own relatives who should have been seeing to the needs of this misfortunate fellow.

Lazarus was like that homeless person rattling his Styrofoam cup at us for our spare change as we pass them by or are waiting at a red light. Weren't there agencies

to which he could appeal? Or that bloated little girl in the magazine and TV photos: Her own government should do better by her, not ours.

Those refugees streaming across Africa or across our own southern border may well be victims of bad politics, warfare, economic mismanagement, or bigotry. Maybe all of the above. But how does any of that imply that their dire plight is OURS to solve? Most of us like to find ways like these to wash our hands of the suffering that lies beyond our realm of perceived responsibility.

The rich man in the story is no different. The rich man knew Lazarus by name, which makes his sin even greater as he chose to walk by him, walk over him, and ignore him as he went back and forth from home. We don't even know the name of the rich man. But we do know that his sin was complacency.

The blindness of the rich man is egregious according to the law of Israel. Almsgiving is not an optional practice for the faithful. It is a commandment.

The God who has given the world as a gift, who gave the Law as gift, who gave the land as gift, wants Israel to give gifts to the hungry, the thirsty, the lonely, the widow and the orphan. The rich man's complacency is not merely against Lazarus. It is against God, against the Law written by the hand of the Lord. The rich man didn't even have to go far to carry out his duty. Lazarus was just outside his gate. And yet the rich man is like those whom Amos castigates, "the complacent in Zion" who dine inclined upon their ivory couches, all the while enjoying pleasant music (Am 6:1). He is arrogant in life, but even more so in death as he dares to order around both Father Abraham AND Lazarus in the next world! What cheek! All too soon, the rich man will learn to his dismay that Father Abraham is the father of Lazarus as well.

The last words of Abraham in the Gospel are chilling. Jesus's parables ask us to take sides. And we tend to take the side of the good guy. We find ourselves in judgment of the rich man, almost hoping that he gets what he deserves. But then the parable turns on us. We have encountered One risen from the dead, Who preached to us a kingdom of the poor.

We have been told by the apostles, echoing His words, to share all things in common, to join in prayer. And yet, are we not the ones who are complacent? Have we not listened to the voice of Jesus?

The Church is made up of those who have been convoked by the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. We are those who strive not for a pleasant life of relative calm – wouldn't THAT be wonderful! -- but we strive for salvation. And the work is very hard indeed!

For us Christians, complacency is the road to hell. It is the hell of contempt for the poor. It is the hellacious contempt toward God.

Unlike the rich man, there's still time for us to stop being complacent.

Start by looking outside your gate to discover there the Lazarus waiting for a morsel of food, a kind word, a love that unites rather than isolates.

How far is our love and compassion obliged to go? More to the point: How far is our obligation to *do something* about human suffering expected to go?

St. Paul writes to Timothy: pursue righteousness, patience and gentleness. Not only with the folks we know, but with the folks we don't know.

Pray: "Lord, let me see them through YOUR eyes, as You see them."

Jesus takes down our walls of bias brick by brick with teachings about loving enemies, blessing those who curse us, returning good for evil, and forgiveness for injury. When Jesus forgives His murderers from the cross, there's nowhere to hide from the truth: We can't wash our hands of anyone.

Charity may begin at home, but it can't stay there. Our humanity makes us one. Our humanity gives us dignity. Our humanity gives us the right to a voice. Together we seek the common good: closing the great chasm between Lazarus and us. Here, in this world, while we still have the time to do it before we die.

A Sunday school teacher told his class today's story about the rich man and Lazarus. He pointed out how one man went to Hell and the other man went to Heaven. He also pointed out how rich one man was and how poor the other man was. After the teacher taught his lesson he said to the class, "Now which would you rather be, the rich man or Lazarus?" One clever boy raised his hand and said, "Well, I'd like to be the rich man while I'm alive, and Lazarus when I'm dead!" Whatever decision you make today, when you die, you will live with its consequences for all eternity.

Choose wisely, choose well, and open those curtains. AMEN!