

St Pius & St Anthony 26th Sunday Ordinary Time Year C(2025) Luke

I think I've shared before about a classmate I had in seminary that I learned never to go hiking with as he always wanted to go off the path, & explore new directions (Hey, I am always up for challenge-something new & adventurous-but tell me in advance,-my issue was we thought we were on an hour hike, not an all day excursion mapping out the whole uncharted forest!) But that first and we'd walked forever and one of the guys said, "Are we close to the trail entrance again yet?" And he told us that, no, we were still advancing deep and away from the start of the trail. Deciding to turn back, he had a survivalist idea to follow this deep ravine creek bed back toward the nearby lake, which we figured was just going farther away, until one of us said, "I think I hear car traffic, I'm going toward it!" and just a little bit of walking got us on to a highway paved road, that led us back to the park entrance and parking area! But I think that we were probably circling and circling for hours, when we could have thrown a rock over a hill and hit asphalt pavement! We were so close to getting out for a while, but didn't realize it! That event reminds me of those very tragic news stories we hear every so often about people being lost in whiteout snowstorms and their dead bodies will be found, after the snow all melts, and they are actually just feet away from safe shelter, or bodies of those lost in the desert who may be found just a little away from a spring or oasis. Something like the blinding snow, or dizzying heat/sun disorient them so badly they never realize just how close they are to being saved. It is so tragic! They are so close, yet still so far away.

I think of those examples, when I hear about Lazarus dying, and he does not any sudden death. No, his death sounds agonizingly stretched out over days of suffering, and he is right at the rich man's doorstep: So close to so much--potential help of food, medicine, clothing, and shelter, but no help is given to him (His name is interesting, because its Hebrew root means, "God helps" - as in 'No one else helped-but God!) Talk about a hell on earth, made even more hellish, because all the while, relief is in sight, but it is just out of reach! In Jesus' parable, everything described about the rich man in excess is described as lacking to Lazarus. The rich man "dines *sumptuously* each day" (Lk 16:19) while Lazarus doesn't even have a scrap to chew on, (the dogs in this parable eat better than him, like how the pigs ate better than the prodigal son in that parable of Luke 15:11-32- Lazarus' mouth watered for even juts scraps from the table, but got nothing – and the fact that the parable describes Lazarus as 'lying on the ground' Lk 16:20, tells me he is starved and has no energy, yet the dogs are running around!) The parable goes on to describe the rich man's dress of purple garments/fine linen (Lk 16:19-20) while Lazarus languishes under a sheet if even that! The reading actually says he is 'covered' (as in clothed in sores! scabs? Lk16:20). Nothing, and how does a person know he is covered in sores unless Lazarus is actually completely bare?

And how hard it was for Lazarus, to feel such barrenness/deprivation and know that inches away from his poverty is such a rich abundance of help, but not given! Yet, things turn, and it says he died and was carried to Abraham's bosom by angels (Lk 16:22). Taken, or 'carried' straight to God's rest, means Lazarus didn't even get the dignity from earth of a decent burial! But God cares for him, eternally blessed! Things sure turned though and we hear that the rich man, passes and finds himself in fiery torment! Things really turn- we might have said of Lazarus that he lived, or was at 'death's door' but turns out that the rich man was at death's door but didn't realize it! I hear this parable telling us of the risk of riches or how high the stakes are in this life about how we use the resources we are blessed to have! We have to notice our neighbor and his/her need, and do something about it- at least care and attend to it (not ignore it) maybe we can't fix it or take it completely away, but we can care and notice them. Reminds me of the story about the beggar who asked for change at a bus stop, and a helper tossed him a quarter and asked, "Buddy, what is your name?" and the beggar said, "I am Carl" and he flipped the quarter back to the man, and said "Thank you-you made my day, take back the quarter because you gave me what no one ever has, **caring** to know my name!"

Scripture scholars point out how unique this parable is, in that it is the only one of the gospels that actually names characters and it is 'Lazarus' the poor man (*Abraham is named too but keep in mind Abraham's gift was hospitality to strangers- Genesis 18*). So a lesson I draw from the parable is the need I have, to become aware of what I am likely oblivious to at the moment? I need to humbly realize that we all have blind spots and we easily overlook the pressing needs/hurts of others around us. So I need to ask myself, "Who is my Lazarus?" What need am I missing, what help could offer that I am presently ignoring? This parable sounds a lot like the parable of the sheep and goats of Matthew 25:31-46, where everyone is surprised, "When did we see you hungry and feed you, or hungry and not feed you....." and they hear the answer, "Whenever you did or didn't help the least of my brothers and sisters"! Our world is full of Lazaruses? What do we do to keep eyes open to see their need, and our hearts open to feel and care for them and our hands open to help them (again maybe we can't solve the problem, but at least we can do something--at least care for and be sensitive to their plight!)

Some people find this parable 'anxiety-inducing' with its fact that we all stand under God's judgement (2 Cor 5:10)! And the finality of the 'unbridgeable chasm' No crossing at all? (Lk 16:26)- where's the mercy in that? Yet it strikes me so deeply that we humans tend to put ourselves into such 'unbridgeable chasms' and out of touch with other people's concerns (out of reach from God by our own actions). We do this when we become so self-absorbed with our own luxury! Wrapped up in ourselves so tightly, we can't feel 'for' other people, or reach out to them. I find the rich man's agony in the fiery torment is self-imposed. His

excessively luxurious life, his riches, has locked him away (isolated him) from being sensitive to Lazarus' need (or even seeing Lazarus with any dignity). Here is how we know the rich man, even in torment, refuses to grant Lazarus a dignified personhood. The rich man shows no feeling, or remorse for Lazarus' hard life (the rich man just doesn't get it!), because notice that even in fiery torment, the rich man only sees Lazarus as a 'slave' for his pleasure. Two times? He demands (Who demands from hell?) of Abraham, that Lazarus be 'sent' for the rich man's satisfaction (how arrogant-air of privilege-entitlement about it!!) He says "Send Lazarus" (Lk 16:24,27) first to fetch him some water, and then to go warn his brothers to wizen up (*What? to at least fake some charity?*) Lazarus can't even rest in heaven! Have a little heart, rich man! But the suffering is caused by the rich man's inability to break through his own little world of personal pleasure, all cordoned off from others by his luxury and wealth. Maybe it would all end, if he felt a little compassion for Lazarus, or little remorse for Lazarus' hard earthly life! But he doesn't even try to understand life from Lazarus' side. Again, he has locked himself out from feeling for other people, and noticing anyone's needs other than his own selfish ones.

Perhaps a question for us all to pray about is "Who is my Lazarus?" Because of being wrapped up in my own world, who and whose need am I not seeing?