

26th SUNDAY OF THE YEAR (C)
KEEP THE COMMANDMENTS UNTIL THE APPEARING OF THE LORD

Is it bad or wrong to be rich? Is it a sin to have properties, or live a happy life? The answer is no. Abraham, Jacob, Isaac, Job, Solomon and many leaders of Israel were rich. Then why did the Lord God warn those who were living well in Israel at the time of Amos, and the rich man in the gospel found himself in hell?

This is because the Patriarchs and the others did not allow their wealth to come between them and God and their neighbour. But the wealthy we heard about did not care about anybody; they lived extravagant lives while the poor went hungry. Their riches made them live idle and complacent lives, and they forget about God.

The rich man in the gospel also did not care at all about the plight of Lazarus. Even when dogs were licking his sores there was no sympathy or concern for him. He did not care about him but wanted him to give him water when he was in torment. This is what many of us do; we will not help others but want others to be at our beck and call when in need.

It is not far from right to say that when one is wealthy or very rich, there is the high tendency to forget about God. One tends to disregard the commandments of God and makes himself or herself God.

The scriptures talk a lot about how wealth and riches corrupt people and turn their hearts from God. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warned, 'Do not store up treasures for yourselves on earth, where moth and woodworm destroy them and thieves can break in and steal. But store up treasures for yourselves in heaven, where neither moth nor woodworm destroys them and thieves cannot steal. For wherever your treasure is, there will your heart be too, (Mt6:19-21). Again, Jesus once told a rich young man, 'If you wish to be perfect, go and sell your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come follow me. But when the young man heard these words he went away sad, for he was a man of great wealth.

Then Jesus told His disciples, it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for someone rich to enter the kingdom of Heaven' (Mt. 19:16-24).

That is why St. Paul advised Timothy to 'aim at or pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, and gentleness. To fight the good fight of faith, and to take hold of the eternal life to which he was called. He charged him to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ'. Because he knew that when one pursues these virtues he or she will think more about God and less about worldly things. At the same time a neighbour's needs become his or her needs. He or she tends to rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep; (Rom. 12:15).

What is our aim as Catholics? What are we pursuing, righteousness or riches and wealth? How strong is our faith? Some of us might have been in the church since Adam but our faith is skin deep. How do we even understand the commandments? The riches can be something more than material things. It can be intellectual knowledge which has made us doubt the importance of the commandment of God. It can be too much self-love that makes us despise everybody. Some of us are rich in wisdom but it does not help us to understand and appreciate situations others find themselves in, and does not help us know God. Many of us know about God but do not know God.

As Abraham told the rich man that there were Moses and the prophets to help his brothers to change, we too have many people and means to help us live righteous and godly lives. How many of us try to read spiritual books or the bible every day? How many listen to religious talks and music to feed our minds and hearts with spiritual messages? It is easy to be like those Amos warned, and the rich man, because, "Those who are living by their natural inclinations have their minds on the things human nature desires; those who live in the Spirit have their minds on spiritual things, and those who live by their natural inclinations can never be pleasing to God", (Rom. 8:5-8).