

THE OCTAVE OF THE FEAST OF THE MOST HOLY TRINITY

Text: St. Luke 16:19-31

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

As you listened to the Word of God in our Gospel text appointed for this day you may have identified with one or the other of the characters in our LORD's parable of the two men, one rich, and the other, sickly and poor. Yet, one errs in identifying with either man since doing so means you have missed the point of our LORD's telling such a story in the first place.

To identify with the poor man invariably leads one down the primrose path of self-justification, jealousy, and covetousness. After all, we all know that the rich do not really deserve what God, in His wisdom, has provided for them. We do not really believe that what they have is a gift from God at all, but rather, ill-gotten gains acquired through theft, lies, cheating, and stealing from the less fortunate. Why, it is common knowledge that all rich people are selfish and evil, caring not one wit for the unfortunate poor cast down before their gates.

Therefore, it is easy for you to feel justified in your hatred and distrust of the rich simply for the reason that they are rich. You feel no guilt whatsoever in making such gross judgments and may even feel that because they are rich and you are poor, they owe you something because being poor makes you better than they are in the eyes of God. After all, did CHRIST not say, "*Blessed are the poor...*" and has God not promised to send the rich away empty? Your accusations cannot be sinful if they are, in fact, true, right?

Yet, if you identify with the rich man, (And who really does?) then you are glad when the pastor tells you that the story is not simply about giving money away to lazy people who never really work for it but is, instead, about faith. After all, your comfort and treasures mean that God loves you and blesses you above others, and because one gets to heaven not by works, but by faith, then this story of the rich man and the poor man makes no real demands of you.

In other words, you do not have to be your brother's keeper, and thus, you may feel justified in living as though what is happening to your fellow human beings and in general, the world around you, are none of your concern. After all, God has it sorted, and if He wants to bless some as He has you, and others not at all, why then, it is completely up to Him to do so. Such is His divine prerogative.

However, as I said, if you identify with either man in such a way then you have entirely missed what JESUS is saying to us with His parable of the poor man and the rich man. If you see yourself as solely one or the other, either poor or rich, then you have missed the point that you *are* a poor man before God, but you are *to be* a rich man to your neighbor.

You see, you can live before God as one of the two men I described above: either as a rich individual who attempts to justify him or herself by all he or she may have, who places their trust in accumulated treasures and the things of this life, or as a poor man who hates and reviles his neighbor who appears to be better off for all he or she may have, which is, in fact, actually questioning the will and wisdom of God who provides all things needed for this body and life. You can live in willful ignorance of the needs of your neighbor, or you can live consumed by jealousy and covetousness, bemoaning the unfairness of God for all the wrongs you have had to endure in life.

Yet, there is another way; a better way.

You can live before God knowing that you deserve nothing and that all you have is provided by our good and merciful God. With the psalmist, you can say to God, *“I have trusted in Your mercy; My heart shall rejoice in Your salvation. I will sing to the LORD, Because He has dealt bountifully with me.”* With Jesus, you can say, *“Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every Word that proceeds from the mouth of God.”*

You see, you can live free, unencumbered by sin as a forgiven child of God, free to forgive and to love and serve your neighbor, or you can live in your own personal hell, despising God and hating your neighbor. You can judge God and your neighbor as though you yourself are god, or you can have God, FATHER, SON, and HOLY SPIRIT, the LORD of life who loves you and cares for you, the Creator of all things who provides for you as He wills.

That, beloved of the LORD, is truly what JESUS’ story is about. Therefore, as you go about living your life in the sight of God, you can live as though God and neighbor do not matter and as if you mattered most. Your eye can be evil because our God is good, or you can thank and praise Him for all His benefits knowing that God’s will is always best. You can worry. You can live your life indifferent to the needs of those around you, or you can rejoice in the bounty God provides new to you every morning, and trusting in His mercy live in the freedom of sharing your blessings with your neighbor.

Before our LORD, we are all truly beggars who have nothing of value within ourselves that merit the love and care of our generous God. We are not only poor beggars, we are debtors who owe all that we have, and all that He has made of us, to our gracious God who loves us.

For this reason, we must think of ourselves as neither rich nor poor; each of us must think of ourselves as what the name “Lazarus” means, *“One whom God helps.”* We must recognize that we are sinners who would be lost without the gracious mercy of our God who has provided more than mere crumbs from His table; He has provided the Bread of Life in the sacrificed flesh of His only SON, JESUS CHRIST. We are made rich in this, having received the crown of life as kings and priests as God’s holy people.

With this, we have everything that the rich man had and more! We, who were poor in spirit, have been made rich in our LORD, for we have JESUS who is God with us!

O the depths of the goodness and grace of God the FATHER who is Love, and His SON, JESUS, who is Love incarnate; who has befriended you, who has saved you, who has died for you and risen from death for you, and the HOLY SPIRIT who has opened your eyes creating faith within you enabling you to see what is really true.

God knows you by name; to you, He gives the riches of His Kingdom; to you, He gives the right to be called a child of God. You too, shall one day recline with Lazarus and all the saints in the bosom of our Father Abraham, because you have heard His Word and believed.

Yes, even this very morning you have heard Moses and the prophets declare salvation in JESUS CHRIST alone. Indeed, you heard more than Moses and the prophets! You heard the Gospel of JESUS CHRIST and believed Him when He said, *"I forgive you all your sins."*

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

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