

The 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Trinity  
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Luke 16:19-31

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Let us pray.

Lord, open now my heart to hear, And through Your Word to me draw near;  
Let me Your Word e'er pure retain; Let me Your child and heir remain. Amen.

*"Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord."*

Among other things, today's Gospel teaches us what it means to "believe in"—even when our circumstances seem to suggest otherwise—to "believe in... the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting."

But let's start at the beginning, and savor each verse of this text. Our Lord has just told his disciples the Parable of the Dishonest Manager, where He concludes: *"You cannot serve both God and money."*

Then Luke tells us, *"The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed [Jesus]. And He said to them, 'You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.'"*

Then three verses later comes this parable. Jesus says:

*"There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day."*

Now there's nothing wrong with that! This parable isn't about the evils of money. Nor does it extol poverty as a good work. Think of all the God-fearing people of faith who were blessed with great wealth—Abraham for one—of whom we heard in today's Old Testament that God credited his faith to him as righteousness.

By itself, this rich man's wealth was not a problem. But the parable goes on.

*At his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores."*

Notice the striking contrast in descriptions. This poor man Lazarus was laid at the gate of the rich man. He couldn't even get there himself, but had to have assistance even to get to where he might be helped. And he was covered with sores. The Greek word implies ulcers of some sort. And the only treatment he could get was to have his sores licked by the dogs. While the only food he could scrounge was the same food the dogs received—whatever fell from the rich man's table.

Now, it would be one thing if this poor man were not at the rich man's gate. But given that his path crossed with the rich man, we are confronted here with a picture of greed and selfishness on the part of the rich man—a misuse of his wealth. It's not what is said about the rich man that's the problem... it's what isn't said. There's not a word here about help or compassion. The rich man's lifestyle included stinginess, and ignoring the needy, like Lazarus.

*The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried,*

Again, notice the contrast. Here we learn, for the first time, that Lazarus must have been a "believer," a child of God, a man whose faith was credited to him as righteousness, just like Abraham's. And what a blessed end awaits such a child of God!... to be "*carried by the angels to Abraham's side*"... Abraham, as representative of all the faithful who have died in the Lord and today are in His presence in paradise.

Contrast that with the unenviable end of the rich man, of whom it is simply said that he "*died and was buried.*" Now it becomes apparent that, though the rich man had "lived his best life now" on earth, he was in fact an unbeliever, not a child of God. For he simply died and was buried.

*And in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.'*

Hades—Hell! Torment. Flames. Separation from the blessed repose of the faithful. No matter how out of vogue it might be to believe and preach about such things, this is the plain teaching of God's Word.

*But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish.'*

And what a great lesson there is to learn from this! What makes this story so instructive is that we get to see the situation from two different time perspectives... "the rest of the story" as it were. We get to see the "Great Reversal" that was not at all apparent during the earthly lives of these two people. In fact, every indication seemed to point to an opposite scenario.

Who would want the life of Lazarus? We flee from suffering. In our heart of hearts we view it, not only as unpleasant and undesirable, but even as a sign that we (or others to whom it befalls) might not be in good standing with God. And, on the other hand, we view worldly success—wealth, popularity, and the like—as signs of blessing from God—that we are doing things right in God's eyes, and are receiving His consequent blessing.

How different this story would be, if it simply ended with the death of each of these two individuals. Do you think Lazarus might have ever questioned God's love and goodness during His lifetime? Do you think he might have ever wondered whether he was being punished for his

sin? But now, from the later perspective of eternal life, we see that—in spite of whatever doubts might have assailed him—Lazarus persevered in the faith. He believed in and found comfort in the forgiveness, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. We see that throughout his seemingly pitiable human condition, the love, blessing, and grace of God rested upon him. And we see that the cross he was given to bear in this world in no way contradicted the eternal weight of glory that was his birthright already on earth.

And, of course, we see just the opposite for the rich man whose master turned out to be himself, rather than the Triune God, all appearances notwithstanding.

But back to the parable. Abraham continues to speak to the rich man, and says:

*‘Besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.’*

Again, the Bible’s teaching about heaven and hell, and the finality of one’s assignment to either.

*And [the rich man] said, ‘Then I beg you, father, to send [Lazarus] to my father’s house—for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.’*

Remember... Lazarus was dead! And so, to send him, would be to send a spirit, a ghost from the grave, a strange and awesome spectacle that would surely get the attention of the rich man’s five brothers. Or so he thought.

*But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’*

“Moses” was the earthly author, inspired by God to write the first five books of the Bible. The “prophets,” of course, were the likes of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, etc. So the phrase, “Moses and the prophets” is Biblical shorthand for “the Scriptures.” Abraham is saying to the rich man that the Scriptures are sufficient to warn his five brothers, and in fact to teach anyone God’s way of salvation. As spectacular and effective as we might think an apparition from the spirit world would be, God’s way of bringing people to faith in Him—of turning even hardened unbelievers to faith, and thus eternal life in heaven—is through the preaching and teaching of God’s Holy Word.

*[But the rich man] said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ [Abraham] said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.’”*

You, dear friends, have Moses and the Prophets, together with Christ’s own words of eternal life. This is the word of God that continues to be preached in Christ’s Holy Church today, and through which the Spirit continues to lead us to Christ, and Christ to the Father. Listen to the Word of God. Gladly hear and learn it. For in it, you have life in Christ’s name!

In this parable, and especially in Lazarus, we see ourselves—children of God whose lives are hidden with Christ in God. Like Lazarus, we too experience suffering and hardship in this life. And it is not for the sake of that, that we are somehow rewarded with eternal life!

But along with his suffering, Lazarus had something that we are never told about the rich man. Lazarus had a name! It was a name known by God. And thus Lazarus was a precious child of God, known and loved by His Father in heaven, for the sake of Jesus Christ. And he was an heir of all the treasures of eternal life in heaven.

You too have a name, dear friend—a name given to you in Holy Baptism where you were made a child of the Heavenly Father, and a partaker in all the righteousness of Christ, your Brother. For the sake of Jesus Christ—who though He was rich, became poor for your sake—God the Father knows and calls you by name! You are His!

Yes, like Lazarus, we are beggars in this life. But that is a good thing! For we are beggars for God's mercy, which we do not deserve, but which is lavished upon us for the sake of Jesus Christ, who died for our sins. And thus, we believe in... the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.