My Beloved Ones,

In this Sunday’s Gospel, Jesus offers us a parable: a Rich Man feasted, while a poor beggar named Lazaros sat outside his gate, ignored, except for the dogs that licked his wounds. Now, both men died, and when the Rich Man’s spirit was tormented in Hades, he could see Poor Lazaros, resting in the Bosom of Abraham. The Rich Man begged Abraham to have mercy on Him; could Lazaros dip one finger in water, to cool his burning tongue? Abraham reminded him that each man’s place was fixed, according to the fruits they bore on earth. Christ then tells us that the Rich Man begged Abraham to send Lazaros to his home; for if his five brothers saw a man rise from the dead, they would repent of their selfishness. Abraham reasoned however that Moses and the Prophets are sufficient, because “‘If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead’” (Luke 16:31).

On the surface, this parable is a warning of how we are to behave if we wish to receive eternal life. On another level, it is possible to interpret Abraham’s refusal of the man’s request to resurrect Lazaros as a rebuke to the religious authorities of Israel; the Pharisees & Sadducees, who clung to the letter of the Law, would never be able to accept Christ—especially not His Resurrection. Even so, we should look at this small detail: the story does not end with the Rich Man’s wailing, but his asking that his brothers be given an opportunity to repent. Even if we accept that the Law and the Prophets are sufficient to understand God’s Will, let us pause to reflect that the Rich Man finally demonstrates concern for someone other than himself.

It is a great mystery that, even in the fires of Hades, he who could not be bothered to think of Poor Lazaros, is now moved to pity at the thought of his fellow man. A great ascetic, Evagrius of Pontus writes that, “There was [a time] when evil did not exist, and there will be [a time] when it no longer exists; but there was never [a time] when virtue did not exist and there will never be [a time] when it does not exist: for the seeds of virtue are indestructible. And I am convinced by the rich man...who was condemned to hell because of his evil, and who felt compassion for his brothers. For to have pity is a very beautiful seed of virtue.”

In today’s Epistle, when speaking of the unimportance of circumcision, St. Paul tells the Galatians that, “…those who receive circumcision... desire to have you circumcised that they may glory in your flesh. But far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world (Galatians 6:13-14).” The “glory of the flesh” was more important to the Rich Man, unlike Poor Lazaros, who was truly “crucified to the world”; and for this reason, they each received what they gave. However, as we struggle against our own desires, let us as take comfort by showing compassion toward our brothers and sisters—the indestructible seed of virtue; a seed of virtue which demonstrates in our own failed, human nature, the perfect nature of Christ.

+ALEXIOS
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