

Fr. John Sassani
Homily Given on September 16, 2007
Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Liturgical Year C

Today's first reading from Amos was chosen to prepare us to hear the parable of Jesus about the rich man and the poor man. And there is a reading from the Letter of St. James that is often chosen to prepare us for the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. There may be a greater connection than there seems between those two readings.

By means of this parable that we hear today, Jesus isn't simply condemning the neglectful contempt that the rich man showed toward Lazarus. Jesus is indicating that faith is a way of life that looks in two directions: vertically to God and horizontally to neighbor. Jesus' idea of faith is both contemplative and active.

St. James, a close relative of Jesus, had a similar view of faith. Repeatedly in his brief letter, he calls Christians to not only hear the word – contemplation – but to be doers of the word – action. Faith is not only what we believe about God but how we accept the call of Christ to be his partners in the world.

But this partnership isn't just about action; it is also about prayer. Prayer allows Christ the opportunity to envision the life of the Kingdom of Heaven, so that – by action – that vision can be enacted. In the Kingdom, no one will be hungry and neglected like Lazarus, because doers of the word assist the poor and neglected. In the Kingdom, no one will be so self-absorbed as to notice another only for personal gain, because doers of the word have the attitude of Christ, who came not to be served, but to serve. In the Kingdom, no one will be sick, because doers of the word pray for the sick and embody the healing touch of Christ for their wellbeing.

St. Theresa has a beautiful prayer about what it means to be doers of the word:

Christ has no body now but ours, no hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks on the world with compassion. Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

Today, Christ looks on the sick with compassion – through *our* eyes. Today, his healing touch is given – through *our* hands.

And then there's Lazarus and the poor. The transformation of poverty, war, prejudice, disease, and so on is *Christ's* work, but he has no body now on earth but us. As we gather for the Eucharist today, Christ comes – Body and Blood, personally – so that we can be reinvigorated as His Body, to do his work by enacting the life of the Kingdom.