

## September 25, 2022

Amos 6:1a, 4-7; 1 Tim 6:11-16; Lk 16:19-31

What the heck is the problem? If we look at the readings today we can think that God is saying that the people who have gotten the good life have got a problem. What's God trying to say?

The message that God is trying to get to us shows up in the first reading from the prophet Amos: *Woe to [you]! Lying upon beds of ivory* (ivory was very valuable, you have to be pretty wasteful with your fortune to make it into a bed), *[who are] stretched comfortably on their couches, they eat lambs taken from the flock, and calves from the stall!* (having extra time and just lounging around, eating pricey meat - which is not practical but purely for satisfying your desires). He says *woe to you* to them ... wait a minute - these people have got it made! They have security, lots of free time, so much stuff that they can just waste it if they want, taking care of themselves as first priority. What's the problem - isn't this what life is all about?

Jesus tells a parable. He talks about two people at opposite ends of the social spectrum. The rich man dresses in royal purple (high social standing), he feasts daily (not just throwing a big meal on the weekend or holidays, but every day). He obviously has more than he needs and wastes it - remember no tupperware or refrigerators back then, leftovers go into the trash. Lazarus is starving and would like to get the the leftovers that the man throws away. Lazarus is also covered with sores (making him a social outcast), and he is licked by dogs (the dogs in the street back dealt with that which people threw away - like Lazarus). The rich man knows about Lazarus (because he sits at his gate every day) - and he does nothing to help.

Jesus is pointing to choices that we all have the ability to make. Namely, what do we do with what we have and what do we do when we see those who are less fortunate? In other words, how do we love those around us over ourselves. He says to us that the decisions we make about these things are not just a matter of right or wrong or Social Justice, but ALSO a matter that effects our eternal salvation. In this parable, and in many other places, Jesus makes it clear that there are two final states of a soul after death - heaven and hell. He speaks of those who go to everlasting happiness and those that go to eternal suffering, He speaks of the eternal fire prepared for the Devil, and says things like: *if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter [eternal] life* (that is, heaven) *crippled than with two hands to go to hell.*

So why does the rich man go to hell? It is because how his lifestyle deeply effected him. From the earliness days, God has made statements through the prophets like Amos, and has spoken in the Law demanding care for the poor and sharing of resources. God has said that the poor have a special place in His heart and that He intends to provide them a great reward - God intends to even the score. The rich man, like many in our world (and even us sometimes) is too focused on the present material world and not on the world hereafter. As a result, to keep himself in the center, he has to suppress the love in his heart that would have moved him to provide for Lazarus, he had to quench the love of God in his heart that loved Lazarus. In order to keep up his own lifestyle, in order to keep up appearances, in order to avoid discomfort, in order to not take the risks that come with loving another person - he ignores Lazarus - this effects him.

He disconnects himself from the love of God in his heart which is motivating him to love others more than himself. In the end God makes up for all Lazarus suffered, and the rich man gets what he always worked for - an existence free from the interference of God. He didn't want listen to God and be near the poor in this life - he did not want to bridge the chasm between himself and those who needed him - so he gets his wish: in the next life they're out of his hair forever - only problem is, the poor are with God. In this life the rich man wanted to be free of God's interference with how he lived his life - and all this ignoring the voice of God made it harder to hear God, and pushing God away, did something spiritual to him. As he crossed to the other side he was on the other side of a deep chasm between himself and God. Problem is that in the next life this separation is a torture (once all the ivory beds, calves in the stall, and cool drinks are gone - you are left with the emptiness of selfish needs with no way to satisfy them). We see the damage to his soul that his lifestyle caused. He still doesn't care about Lazarus (he just want him to be his butler), he doesn't ask for union with God, he just asks for his brothers to be warned. Abraham reminds him that the prophets and law have been telling them what to do - they just have to do it. Abraham goes on to say that those who ignore the prophets and law will also ignore the one who will rise from the dead: Jesus - who's voice we are hearing today.

It is up to us to avoid the allure of wasteful self-indulgence. It is up to us to join with God in His special love for the poor, rejected, and downtrodden. In doing so we unite ourselves spiritually to that God who loves them in a special way. Paul counsels us today: *But you ... pursue righteousness, devotion, faith, love, patience, and gentleness.* (in this way you will not be left separated from God and will) ... *Lay hold of [the] eternal life, to which you were called.*