

The 26th Sunday in Ord. Time – September 23-24, 2022

Sometimes we may find ourselves not listening that closely to the Scripture reading at Sunday Mass. However, the Church has carefully chosen these readings for guidance and help for us that we might stay on the path of Christ as we make our journey with him back into full union with God. They are a lamp for our feet and light to our path.

We don't always understand how critical it is for us to return to and remain living in God and in Christ.

I was listening to a CD tape of a retreat someone shared with me and found it very helpful when the person giving the retreat explained that the Garden of Eden shows us how our life was meant to be lived in God. Everything in the Garden of Eden was wonderful for Adam and Eve, the first humans and we are told that God would go for walks with Adam and Eve each day. However, God gave them and us free will and when they chose to disobey God they were separated from the life of God and to leave the Garden. And what happens when they are separated from God? Sin comes in and relationships fall apart and They are unable on their own to get back into union with God. The person giving the retreat noted that immediately in that first generation after leaving the Garden of Eden we have the story of Cain murdering his brother Abel.

He then gave the example of what happens when we take our gold fish out his tank of water and put him on the table. If we do this, the goldfish will flop around and eventually die, because it was made to live in water and not simply in air.

Likewise we were made to live in God and we will die spiritually like the goldfish, if we are not living in God or in Christ. But like the goldfish, we can't get back into bowl or life in Christ without the help of God.

The mission of Christ was and is to get us back into our life in God and help us keep growing again in God.

Today's readings like last week are again about our relationship to and use of money and possessions. Because money and possessions are critical for life for us in this life, it is easy for us

to become fearful and anxious about them and easy for us to let them take control of us and become the central concern in our life even though they are passing things.

Last week we talked about how we like Christ have been given an eternal dignity and share in the life of God and so are greater than money, possessions and other passing things of this life and we need to keep in mind that higher dignity and eternal life and destiny that we have.

This week the Word of God teaches us and warns us about how the focus on the accumulation of wealth and possessions and the pleasures they can bring can make us unconscious of the needs of others and our responsibility to care about them and about what is really happening around us.

In the first reading, God through Amos, warns the Israelites that their overindulgence in the pleasures of their prosperity had dulled them to the point of complacency and not caring about the suffering of their fellow Israelites in the Northern Kingdom of Israel and has even led them to be uncaring that they too are in danger of being attacked by Assyrians who are destroying the Northern Kingdom.

Just before today's Gospel there is a line not included in today's reading. which notes that after hearing Jesus' parable about the dishonest steward, the Pharisees, who loved money, sneered at Jesus' words. We need to see that money or wealth is not bad in itself, and that in the life to come we are in fact promised that heaven will be a place of rich blessings, **but** we need to be careful what we do with our wealth and be careful about the affect that it can have on how we see what is going on around us.

The rich man in today's gospel parable is not condemned because of his wealth but for the fact that his riches had led him to be unconcerned and unconscious and uncaring about the poor man suffering on his doorstep so much so that he did even share with him the scraps from his table while it was his dog that came and licked the poor man's wounds.

The rich man knew that the poor man was there, and knew his name and even was aware of what he should have done we see when he asks Abraham to go and warn his brothers not to do

what he did. But he chose to remain blind to the poor man's needs. Rather than acknowledge his guilt, the rich man chose to pretend that there was nothing he could do for the poor man. Even now, do we at times assume there is nothing we can do to help the many Lazaruses around our door or in the world. Yet some years back when most of the institutions for mentally disabled persons were closed and we instead build group homes --- how many times did we hear people say – don't build one in my neighborhood.

Again it is not wealth that is the problem. Jesus gets to the real problem—our human hearts diseased by selfishness. Thanks be to God, as today's psalm says – God has set us free from our captivity. Through his Holy Spirit he gives us new hearts and with that new divine grace and power he urges us to order our lives rightly – Love God first, and then love our neighbors as ourselves.

The Lord is not against riches – he came in order to make us rich, but he will not allow us to be captivated by false riches. The road to true riches is clearly laid out for us. Jesus tells us: “Lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven.” We are called to the high honor being and acting like God who laid down his life to restore us in our poverty to relationship with God. We are called to be holy.

No – we cannot alone take care of all the needy in the world, but we are called to properly use the gifts God has given us. The rich man wanted Abraham to go back and warn his brothers, but Abraham said they have been warned. Besides Sacred Scripture – we too have been warned in other ways. One example is the many second collections we have throughout the year. They can be overwhelming, but at least they keep reminding us of the need to share our gifts and help to keep us on the path to deeper life and joy in God

Because we naturally want a lifestyle that is as comfortable as possible, we are doomed to be complacent and hard-hearted unless we receive a new nature and live in that new nature. The Holy Spirit is our hope. The Holy Spirit gives us the possibility and power of living the Christian life and being freed from the death and condemnation of a self-centered lifestyle. Come Holy Spirit!