

**Lazarus**  
**26<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)**  
**(Lk 16:19-31)**

Jesus ends this parable with the statement, placed in the mouth of Abraham, “*If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone should rise from the dead*” (Lk 16:31). The point being that we already have in the Scriptures everything necessary to avoid judgment in the next life. Through the law of Moses, and the warnings of the prophets, God has shown exactly how to live in order to remain safely in the “bosom of Abraham,” and hence be able to receive the eternal life of heaven.

Elsewhere Jesus will summarize and distill the entire “law and the prophets” down to one simple commandment: “Love God above all, and your neighbor as yourself” (cf. Mt 22:37-40). Do this, and there is no danger of going to hell.

The irony of this final verse is that God has in fact brought someone back from the underworld to preach and warn the rich and powerful about their sins, but they did not listen. And I’m not referring to Jesus’ resurrection, which in any case was mysterious and not public, limited in appearance to his previous followers. I’m referring to a beggar named Lazarus, whom Jesus called forth from the tomb several days after his corpse had been buried (cf. Jn 11).

Following his sojourn in the underworld of Sheol, and returning to earth, Lazarus gave testimony to any and all who would listen (Jn 12:11), but for the rich and powerful it had no effect. In fact, his warnings only caused them to double down and accelerate their plans to arrest and kill Jesus (Jn 11:45-53).

The parable of Lazarus the Beggar is the only time Jesus ever names one of the characters in a parable. This unique exception, combined with the final statement about coming back from the dead, leaves no doubt that Jesus is building his teaching in this parable on an actual event to take place.

From St. Luke’s Gospel, we learn that Jesus’ friend Lazarus was a beggar, and he was a beggar because he was a leper, covered in sores (Lk 16:20). For public safety, the Law of Moses required that anyone with an infectious disease had to be quarantined from the community (Lv 13-14). Such people were in a desperate situation, and because they could not be hired, they depended on assistance from their family and the general public to survive. Beggars would live outside the city, usually near the garbage dump where they could scrounge and scavenge materials they needed. Beggars would wait near gates to solicit donations from passersby. And as the Gospel indicates, they would station themselves near the houses of the rich, especially on occasions of great banquets, to plunder the garbage being taken out, to receive the “scraps from the table.”

The Scriptures are insistent that it is a serious moral obligation to provide for such beggars, and Jesus reinforces this moral duty by threatening hellfire to those who overlook it (cf. Mt 25:31-46). The rich man in hell sinned not by something he *did*, but by something he *failed to do*.

The Gospels reveal that the beggar Lazarus was a dear friend of Jesus, deeply loved by him (Jn 11:3,35-36). Jesus befriended the poor, the beggars, the lepers. Wherever he went he preached not only to the healthy in the marketplaces, but also took the time to visit the isolated. By personal example he showed the Church the importance and priority of helping those in need, illustrating what it means to “love your neighbor as yourself.”

This, then, is our “homework assignment” for the upcoming week, based on the lesson of the Gospel today; to find and assist that person God has placed in our path, whom He needs us to help. We need to give serious thought to that individual who might literally be your “neighbor,” living near you, or who is in your circle of family and friends. Someone perhaps who has fallen off your radar because of age, illness, or infirmity. Someone who has become more homebound due to age, or who is currently in a nursing home; someone who is not able to take care of himself as well anymore. We have a grave and fundamental moral obligation, on pain of hell, to check on this person, see what he might need, and make sure it is arranged.

Last Sunday Jesus stressed the similar lesson by urging us to make the friends we will need for our judgment day. The rich man was unable to benefit in any way from the assistance of Lazarus, beloved of God, in his afterlife. May the same not be true for us.