



September 25, 2022

Twenty-sixth Sunday of Ordinary Time

"Between you and us a great chasm is established..." Luke 16:26



Dear Friends,

Oxfam International (British charitable organization) reports this year, *"The world's ten richest men more than doubled their fortunes from \$700 billion to \$1.5 trillion—at a rate of \$15,000 per second or \$1.3 billion a day during the first two years of a pandemic that has seen the incomes of 99 percent of humanity fall and over 160 million more people forced into poverty. If these ten men were to lose 99.999 percent of all their wealth tomorrow, they would still be richer than 99 percent of all the people on the planet...they have six times more wealth than the poorest 3.1 billion people."* In a briefing entitled *Inequality Kills*, Oxfam says that inequality is contributing to the death of at least 21,000 people each day or one person every four seconds.

Given such statistics Jesus's parable of *Lazarus and the Rich Man* have current and urgent ramifications. This parable is brilliant and still applicable today.

To fully grasp the implication of the parable we need to pay attention to the details. First, there are usually no names in parables. They are usually universal characters. But the poor man has the dignity of being called by name, Lazarus. In contrast the rich man is not named. We make a big deal about knowing the names of the rich and famous apparently God isn't impressed with celebrity worship, the man of means is anonymous "rich guy."

The next thing we notice is the presence of the abyss that divides the rich man from Lazarus. Where did that abyss begin? It did not begin after the rich man died. It was present all the time. The rich man is like the "complacent" in our reading from the Prophet Amos. He condemns them for lying on ivory beds and drinking wine from silver bowls while ignoring the economic and political threats to the poor and working classes. The rich man each day steps over Lazarus (who is covered in sores that dogs lick). The abyss is created by ignoring the situation.

The bible does not condemn wealth nor wealthy people per se. But the expectation of God and the culture of Jesus is that such people share their surplus and become "patrons" of the needy. After all, the earth and all that it contains belongs to God. And what the earth contains is meant to be shared by all. We are just temporary managers called to fairly distribute goods of the earth. When the wealthy do not share, they are rightfully condemned as greedy.

Finally, why is Lazarus resting in the bosom of Abraham and not some other biblical figure? Abraham is the righteous figure who is the opposite of the rich man. Abraham was a man of wealth but he above all he was generous and hospitable. This is a reproach to the greedy rich and their inhospitality. Abraham used to pursue passers-by and drag them to his residence. Abraham's hospitality led him to entertain three messengers who promised him the blessing of a son and many descendants. Whereas our rich man disregarded a man lying in his own doorway. The rich man had such an opportunity to redeem himself but failed to do so. And he will not be able to do so from the abode of the dead.

St John Chrysostom comments, *"If you show much eagerness in welcoming some famous and distinguished person you do nothing remarkable; often the high rank of a guest compels even a reluctant host to show every sign of courtesy. But we do something truly great and admirable when we give a courteous welcome to all, even the outcasts of society or people of humble condition."* We must pay attention for our sake and the sake of all.

Peace,

Fr Ron

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