

26TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

By Al Mansfield

Amos 6:1, 4-7

Psalm 146

1 Timothy 6:11-16

Luke 16:19-31

RICH AND POOR

We have all probably heard the expression, "I've been poor and I've been rich - and rich is better." Today's readings, however, make us seriously question that. Money, riches, wealth - can definitely present an obstacle to entering the kingdom of God. "The love of money is the root of all evil" (1 Tim. 6:10).

AMOS

The prophet Amos, who hailed from the southern Kingdom of Judah, wore out his welcome in the northern Kingdom of Israel and was eventually kicked out. Today's reading is perhaps one of the reasons why! Amos here denounces the prosperity and luxury among those living in the area of the tribes of Joseph. Social corruption and oppression of the poor were prevalent, along with the worship of pagan gods.

Amos predicts the coming captivity and exile of the northern tribes of Israel, which took place during the Assyrian invasion beginning around 733 BC.

The Responsorial, Psalm 146, reflects God's care for the oppressed and hungry; captives, the blind and strangers; the fatherless, widows and those bowed down.

GOSPEL

Today's gospel is that of the Rich Man and Lazarus, found only in Luke. It is a striking - and somewhat scary - warning about ignoring the poor and disabled in our midst. It seems that the sin of the Rich Man was one of omission - he failed to alleviate Lazarus' pain when he easily could have done so. For this the Rich Man was "suffering torment in these flames," and asks Lazarus for a mere drop of water.

When told that the chasm between them was uncrossable, the Rich Man thinks of his five brothers and asks if Lazarus could visit them to warn them. The final verse is poignant, "If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets neither will they be persuaded if someone should rise from the dead."

The point is clear: Jesus did rise from the dead, but there were - and still are - those who refuse to believe and repent.

1 TIMOTHY

For the past few weeks, our second reading has come from St. Paul's First Letter to Timothy - his companion, co-worker, and now a young bishop. Paul exhorts Timothy here - as in other places - to "fight the good fight of faith."

Paul then challenges Timothy - and us - to live righteously, to defend the faith, to keep the commandments. He exhorts Timothy and us to look to Jesus "who gave testimony under Pontius Pilate for the noble confession."

Today's selection closes with a beautiful doxology to the "King of kings and Lord of lords." (It is rather curious that, in light of the emphasis of the first reading and gospel, this reading stops short of verses 17-19, which exhort the rich not to be proud and selfish but rather to be generous and charitable.)

MONEY!

No question about it, wealth can present an obstacle to entering the Kingdom (recall the camel and the eye of the needle!). But money, used in the right way, can also help both giver and receiver enter the Kingdom. (Suppose the Rich Man had used some of his wealth to help Lazarus!) Let us keep our eyes on Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, as we are told in the Alleluia Verse: "Though Our Lord Jesus Christ was rich, he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich."