

29th September 2019 (26th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C)

Amos 6:1,4-7; Psalm 145(146):7-10; 1 Timothy 6:11-16; Luke 16:19-31.

'...listen to them!'

In the gospel according to Luke, Jesus is constantly battling the Pharisees and the leaders of the Jews who refuse to listen to the message of the good news he is proclaiming. They criticise Jesus because he finds time to welcome and listen to sinners; in doing so they distance themselves further from the message of God's infinite love and mercy. Jesus challenges the Pharisees not because of their wealth, but because of their hardness of heart.

Jesus speaks another parable. The wealthy man locks himself in his mansion enjoying his affluent lifestyle. He is not necessarily wicked, but he refuses to put into action the word of God that invites him to reach out to those who are in need. There is a very close and important link between faith and action. I cannot proclaim that I have faith, and expect to share in the life of God, unless I am able to demonstrate this in the way I live.

The wealthy man in the parable has no time for Lazarus who waits patiently at his doorstep and would be grateful to eat the scraps that fall off the rich man's table and are handed over to the house-dogs. He is the rich man's conscience constantly reminding him that his wealth is not his own, but is given to him by God in stewardship, to share with those who are poorer. When I lock myself inside, surrounded by my wealth, I am automatically locking others outside in their poverty.

The wealthy man chooses not to live the life of God as portrayed in scripture – the law (Moses) and the prophets. Even the Old Testament invites us to reach out to the poor and the widow who have no one to support them, and to look after them. Jesus warns us that the choices we make here on earth have a direct relationship with our life in God after death. To the extent I have come to know, experience and live God here on earth, to that same extent I will be able to recognise God in heaven. While reading of the word of God, prayer and meditation are important tools in the journey of my relationship with God, these need to be reflected in a practical way in my daily life through my actions and relationships.

In the parable, the wealthy man who locks himself inside his mansion surrounded by his wealth, finds himself locked out of the bosom of Abraham where all the faithful children of God are gathered, while poor Lazarus who has been locked out in this life, is now welcomed inside among God's children. It is not God who sends the rich man to 'Hades' but it is he rich man who chooses not to recognise God in the poor man on his doorstep. Just as he refuses to cross the divide between his great wealth and the Lazarus' poverty, so now also it is not possible for Lazarus to cross the divide that has been fixed, by the rich man himself, between 'us' and 'you.'

Now the rich man wants to reach out and try to save his sisters and brothers; he wants Lazarus to do him a favour and go and warn the rest of his family so they realise their mistake and start living the life of God now. Jesus, through Abraham's voice, warns the Pharisees and us that we need to listen to God's word. God's message is there! If we refuse to listen to God's word, then nothing can help us build our relationship with God here and enjoy after our death – not even if someone were to rise from the death!

We do have an advantage over the Pharisees in Jesus' time; we not only have God's word to reflect upon, but also have the risen Christ as a warning. We do participate in the life of God through the body of Christ, but do I allow my actions to reflect what I declare to be my faith? Do I reach out to the world around me? Do I let the word of God influence my relationship with those around me?

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