

Sunday September 25, 2022  
26th Sunday in Ordinary Time

## Parishioner Reflection

*By: Jonathan Tucker*

As much as I may be tempted to spiritualize the parable in today's reading or relegate it to just another testy exchange between Jesus and his critics, its central message is consistent with what Luke says elsewhere in his Gospel.

Jesus links the fates of the rich man and Lazarus, in death, with their experiences of wealth and poverty in this life.

Notice, the rich man has no name. By contrast, the poor man is named; Lazarus, which means "God has helped." (Apparently there is no connection between this Lazarus and the individual raised in John 11:1-44.)

Jesus' parable begins with a drastic reversal that occurs after each man dies (16:19-23). The contrast could not have been more stark. In life, the rich man's time and wealth were spent at the expense of Lazarus - on himself on the finest of clothes (possessions) and lavish feasts (comforts) daily. It wasn't as if Lazarus lived in some other part of town; he laid "at his gate". Which means the rich man would have had to make an effort to ignore him. Lazarus' needs were obvious; he lacked shelter, was covered with sores, was starved of food daily, and had only dogs to lick his sores. But this all changed with death. Lazarus is carried away to an honored place with Abraham. (Elsewhere in Luke's gospel Abraham is referred to as God's friend and the father of Israel. But the rich man finds himself in a place of torment.

A conversation follows between the rich man and Abraham (16:24-26). Now finding himself in Hades, the rich man asks Abraham to send Lazarus to ease his discomfort. But Abraham responds that this is no longer possible. During their lifetimes, Lazarus had suffered, while he had received good things. These could have been used to offer comfort to Lazarus, but weren't. Now in the afterlife, Lazarus is comforted, and he is in discomfort as a consequence. "Between you and us a great chasm has been fixed which can't be crossed", Abraham replies.

Now, having understood the connection between his behavior in life and its consequences, the rich man pleads with Abraham to send Lazarus to warn his five brothers (16:27-41) before it is too late. But Abraham's replies, "they already have Moses and the prophets to warn them". Although Lazarus insists that his brothers will change their ways if someone visits them from the dead, Abraham responds, "if they have not listened to Moses and the prophets, they will not be

convinced by someone being raised from the dead”. (This may have been a foreshadowing of Jesus’ own death and resurrection to follow, incidentally.)

Jesus’ parable to the Pharisees is no less applicable to me today than it was to those to whom he spoke to so many centuries ago. It draws the connection between my own agony or comfort after death with how those less fortunate around me are treated during my life. It reminds me of our heavenly father’s care and concern for those less fortunate at my gate. Not only that, but it warns of the cost and consequence to me that follows from misplaced priorities, pursuits and confidences.