

Gospel – Lk 16:19-31

One of the grandest scenes described in Scripture is the last Judgment where Jesus tells us what it will be like when he returns at the end of time. Every man, woman, and child who was ever conceived will stand before the throne of the King of Kings to learn his eternal destiny, a destiny we each shaped during our brief sojourn on earth by how we treated the less fortunate among us because Jesus tells us whatever we did for the least of his brethren we did for him.

Contrast this with the scene in today's gospel, a parable of only two men, one rich – one poor. Yet despite the great difference in the imagery of these two passages, our Lord's message in both is exactly the same. We ignore the struggling poor at our own peril. Everything we have, our intellect, our material goods, even our lives are gifts from God. And when God generously gives me more than I need, it's incumbent on me to share it with those less fortunate.

Note that in today's Gospel, the rich man isn't condemned for breaking one of the Ten Commandments. He didn't kill anyone, commit adultery, lie, or dishonor his parents or God's name. He simply saw, yet ignored, the suffering Lazarus lying at his gate. Think of the prayer we say at the start of Mass. I have greatly sinned in my thoughts, in my words, in what I have done ... and in what I have failed to do. I imagine when we think of what we have failed to do many of us think of the times we missed Sunday Mass for no good reason. And that's a sin, but it's clear from this parable there are other sins of omission than missing Sunday Mass. In fact, if we know something is the right thing to do and fail to do it, that's as sinful as doing what we know to be wrong.

In Jesus' time, the rich man would have been expected to give alms to anyone begging, and he might have done just that. But here's a point that would not have been lost on Jesus' hearers, but might be lost on us. Jesus doesn't tell us that Lazarus was begging. Lazarus was simply lying at the rich man's gates where the rich man could see him whenever he went in or out. How like Jesus this is! He expands the expectations for those who would follow him. He's telling us to keep our eyes open to see the needs of those around us, and to the extent we can, respond to them without having to be asked.

Notice also that Lazarus is named, but the rich man is not. Maybe that's because Jesus wants us to see ourselves in the rich man. So if I'm the rich man, where is Lazarus; who is Lazarus? Lazarus is a starving child. She is the victim of a disaster – natural or manmade - anywhere in the world. Closer to home, he's the migrant worker hoping to save enough money to support his family's meager existence until the next harvest season. She's holding a sign that says hungry, homeless, please help. He's an undocumented immigrant fearing that today he will be discovered, picked up, and deported. She's an incarcerated addict who rarely if ever gets any visitors or the family

in Irvine whose breadwinner just lost his or her job, and they're trying to figure out how to make ends meet. It's highly likely that at some Mass this Sunday in this very church, someone will turn to Lazarus, smile, and say "Peace be with you" and not recognize him. Lazarus is my brother; she's my sister. And to answer the first questions asked by a man in Scripture, "Yes, I am my brother's keeper". And so are all of us.

Where is Lazarus? Look around us. He can be anywhere. Maybe we just didn't recognize him the last time we saw him. And his needs might be other than monetary. I can think of one place, however where she's not. Thanks to the media – newspapers, the internet, and television she's moved past our gates. She's come into our living rooms where we cannot help but see her. And if we honestly call ourselves Christian we cannot ignore her plight. If we are to truly live our Catholic faith, not merely profess it, then to the extent we are able, we will help our struggling sister.