

26th Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)

September 28, 2025

“Three take-aways from Lazarus and Dives”

There is a Jewish story told about a rabbi who traveled to Rome in the Third Century. He was astonished to behold the magnificent buildings. He was especially struck by the care lavished upon statues, which were covered with exquisite cloth to protect them from the summer heat.

As he was admiring the beauty of Roman art, a beggar plucked at his sleeve and asked for a crust of bread. The wise man looked at the statues, and turning to the man in rags, said, “Here are stone statues covered with expensive clothes. And here is a man, created in the image of God, covered with rags (Gen. 1:27). A civilization that pays more attention to statues than human beings shall surely perish.”

That Third Century Jewish man could be speaking to us in the Twenty-First Century. A civilization in which the world’s richest man cuts off food aid to the poorest children, when the gap between rich and poor is growing, when the top 10 percent hold about 35 percent of the nation’s wealth, we need to ask ourselves, “What are our priorities?”

Three words in today’s Gospel parable represent three take-aways for our consideration: *chasm*, *remember*, and *send*.

The first word is *chasm*. In the afterlife, Abraham tells the rich man, “*Between us and you a great chasm is established to prevent anyone from crossing*” (16:26). A chasm is a huge gap between places. It prevented the rich man from contacting poor Lazarus in the next life.

The thing to note is that the rich man created the chasm *in this life* by neglecting his needy neighbor. The rich man saw Lazarus at his gate every day, needy, starving, sick, and did nothing. Consider this: If Lazarus lay at his gate every day, then in ten years, the rich man ignored him for a total of 3,650 days. In that time, he could have fed, clothed, and provided medicine to poor Lazarus, but chose

to keep his distance. And in the next life, God simply ratified those choices. We create chasms by the distance we put between ourselves and the poor.

The second word is *remember*. Abraham said, “*My child, remember that you received what was good during your lifetime while Lazarus likewise received what has bad*” (16:25). God, who remembers all, will judge us on what we do NOT do, as well as what we do—omission is as sinful as commission. The rich man never actively hurt Lazarus, but instead chose to indulge himself in exquisite delicacies, fine clothes, and a comfortable home. He was completely indifferent to the needy neighbor at his gate. God remembers this, and we should too. What are you and I NOT doing to help the poor?

The third word is *send*. This refers to a request of the rich man. Twice the rich man in Hell asks Abraham to send Lazarus, of all people, to refresh his thirst and to warn his brothers about their future Hellish destiny (16:27, 30). The rich man never changed in the next life. To him, Lazarus was always a slave, a wretch, a means of accomplishing his goal. We’re not going to suddenly change from wicked to virtuous when we die. Our character is shaped by daily actions, attitudes, thoughts, and decisions, and that character can become fixed. We have free will until the end of life, but bad habits can cause our hearts to become like stone, and we can end up seeing our neighbor as a mere means to our ends.

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus is a stark warning: (1) don’t create chasms, (2) remember that God is watching what we don’t do, and (3) attitudes don’t automatically change when we die.

One of the new values in our Dubuque Journey of Faith is charity, which is seeking the good of others as we respond to their needs. May Our Lady of Charity inspire us to reach out in love to the neediest among us. God bless you.