

Connecting with the Sunday Readings

Twenty-sixth Sunday of Ordinary Time Gospel Word
Luke 16:19–31

The parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus is packed with unforgettable images and dialogue. It very vividly shows the contrast between the values of this world and the values of the Kingdom. On the one hand, in their worldly lives, the Rich Man is steeped in abundance, honor, and self-righteousness. Lazarus, on the other hand, is a sick man who lives as a beggar in squalor, labeled an outcast by the self-righteous who see him as unclean and “sinful.” The Rich Man is even honored in death with a proper burial, while we are only left to guess what happened to Lazarus’ body. Such are the values of the world.

“Act II” presents the contrast between the values of the Kingdom and the values of the world. Lazarus goes to the bosom of Abraham, a traditional Jewish way of describing the reward of the just man and the Rich Man goes to the underworld. The Rich Man, of course, was unable to take his riches with him after he died, nor any of the power associated with them. He ended up in the worst imaginable conditions. Even then he would still like Lazarus to serve him!

We also learn something about the mindset of the rich portrayed in the Gospel. They are not open to spiritual wisdom if it involves giving what they have to the poor. Even if someone from the dead comes back to warn them of what’s ahead, they won’t change their ways. Abraham’s response is that not only is this not possible; even if it were, it would not work. They are stuck in their ways. They are not willing to change.

Living the Word

Luke’s Gospel provides a foundation for the social teachings of the Church. It consistently decries the scandalous gap between the rich and the poor, a situation that continues into our own time. The differences between the rich and the poor in the time of Jesus often mention food because it was scarce, again, just as it is in certain parts of the world today. And Jesus uses the image of a banquet over and over again to describe what the Kingdom is like. Today’s Gospel reading is not only about giving food to the poor. It’s about closed attitudes, selfishness, and callousness. It challenges us to examine our deeper attitudes about sharing our bounty, our own riches, meager though they may be, with others who are more needy. We live in a country where most people have enough to eat and more. Many of us overeat every day. We have the highest rate of obesity in the world and even some of our pets are put on diets.

The Gospel contains implications for the way we live in this world. For us the Gospel is basically about how to live *here and now*, not what comes afterwards. The Gospel does not demand radical poverty but rather awareness and response in dealing with the many issues of human and spiritual hunger. Our worlds can be very self-centered. There is no formula in the Gospels about how much we should give or even to whom. But it does invite us to consider the needs of others, and make a serious effort to do something to make the world a better place for all, especially the poor. Today’s Gospel is an invitation to us individually and as families to do what we can to help “the Lazarus People” of the world.

One-line Prayer

Generous God, create in us more generous hearts. Amen.