

26 Sunday C

September 25, 2022

St. Patrick

Ah, it's all turned upside down! As Abraham put it in Jesus' story, saying it to the rich man: **“Remember that during your lifetime you received good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things, but now he is comforted here, but you are in agony.”**

Yes, Jesus turns everything upside down—if I really listen to him. Early in the year we heard Jesus give the Beatitudes in St. Luke's Gospel: **“Blessed are you poor...Woe to you rich”** (6:20, 24). It's the “great reversal,” Jesus turning everything upside down, and Jesus wants the rich—and those of us who'd like to be rich—to squirm, or else, pretend we really didn't hear him (1).

As Jesus tells the story, at times I've wondered why the destitute man, Lazarus, ended up in *Abraham's* arms in heaven. Why Abraham, and not someone else? Then, I came across a sermon by the 4th century saint, John Chrysostom, who pointed out that of all the folks in the Bible, Abraham was the best known for his hospitality. Abraham used to even “pursue passers-by and drag them into his home,” welcoming them graciously! (2)

In telling his story, Jesus wanted to contrast Abraham's generous welcome with that rich man's cold shoulder to poor Lazarus. That guy passed by each day and, at his gate, lay the destitute Lazarus, covered by sores.

Why, then, is the rich man condemned by God? Not only because he is wealthy. He is condemned because he never *saw* Lazarus at the front gate of his mansion. Lazarus was always there, but he didn't *see* him. He never looked at Lazarus in the face. Unlike Abraham, that rich guy didn't show a smidgen of hospitality.

That, Friends, is the teaching of the parable: The frightening danger in possessions is that they tend to make us blind. I don't *see* Lazarus and his sort, and I don't offer hospitality as was Abraham's consistent habit!

There's a hodgepodge of ways Lazarus shows up in our midst, St. Patrick's, and a smorgasbord of ways we actually see Lazarus. Some examples. Yesterday we had our 19th Mobile Food Pantry, in which we welcomed 500 cars, distributing food that is in short supply for many people. It was the 19th time, and we were told that over these times, we've given out a week-supply of food for 38,000 persons.

Parishioner Sister Maureen Griner founded the Dorothy Day Houses of Hospitality for homeless families; and now, with Sister's retirement, parishioner Tracey Burgess is taking on that leadership so that homeless families can experience their dignity in proper housing.

Other parishioners prepare fine meals and serve them for those who are hungry. Another parishioner cuts hair for those who live on the streets. Another parishioner thought of a diaper ministry for neighborhood mothers (I thought it would never pan out—Was I wrong!) Parishioners have looked for an ill Lazarus in Tanzania, and made sure that we became part of the solution. We've been linked with the citizens' organization MICAH, so that we just don't toss out charity, but also work together to make justice at work in our midst. As Pope St. John Paul II put it 42 years ago when he preached on Lazarus and the rich man in *our* United States, **"Humanity must translate (this parable) into contemporary terms of economy and politics..."**

Ah, yes, Friends, we're called not simply to glance at the Lazarus in our midst daily. We're called truly to *see* his dignity. Jesus in his piercing story is calling us to share in solidarity with those who know what it's like to be Lazarus in our times.

At the end of the parable, Abraham says, **"If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead."**

St. Patrick's: During each Sunday Mass we celebrate that, in fact, **"someone did rise from the dead."** May we hear *this* Risen Jesus today, and truly *see* this Jesus in the Lazarus in our midst!

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- (1) See Michael Simone, "True discipleship requires sacrifice for the needs of others" in *America* (September 16, 2019).
 - (2) St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 2 on Lazarus*, 5, as in "A Most Courteous Welcome to All," in *Give Us This Day—September 2022* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2022), pp. 254-55.
 - (3) See "Homily of His Holiness John Paul II" on October 2, 1979, in New York @w2.vatican.va.

General Intercessions

September 25, 2022

26th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Open our eyes to *see* the Lazarus—the poor one—in our midst; we pray to you, O Lord—

Energize with a renewed faith, hope and love the Church in West Tennessee, that we might live as the Good Samaritan on the banks of the Mississippi; we pray to you, O Lord—

Heal the wounds of racism, bigotry, and division in our nation, world, and church; we pray to you, O Lord—

Give relief and support to those suffering from Hurricane Fiona in Puerto Rico and elsewhere; we pray to you, O Lord—

Sustain all who reach out to Lazarus in our midst, such as our St. Patrick Champion Outreach Center, St. Vincent de Paul Society, the Dorothy Day House of Hospitality, and the Room in the Inn; we pray to you, O Lord—

Bring those who have died into heaven's hospitality at Abraham's side, especially Anthony Ryan, Father Richard Cortese, and Jane Hampshire; we pray to you, O Lord--

