



My Beloved Ones,

This Sunday's Gospel is one that is familiar to many Christians. Luke the Evangelist gives us an account of the unnamed Rich Man, who ate and drank without care—all while a poor beggar named Lazarus sat outside his gate, ignored by everyone, except the dogs that would come to lick his wounds.

As comes to all who forsake the Word of God for a life of selfishness, the Rich Man died, and his spirit was tormented in Hades. All the while, the Rich Man could see Poor Lazarus, now resting in the Bosom of Abraham, on account of Lazarus' life of humble suffering. The Rich Man, being in great pain begged Abraham to have mercy on Him; could Lazarus simply be allowed to dip only one finger in water to cool his burning tongue? Abraham reminded him however, that each man's place was fixed, according to the fruits they bore on earth.

Christ then tells us that the Man begged Abraham to send Lazarus to his home; for if his five brothers were to see a man rise from the dead, they would repent. Abraham

reasoned however that Moses and the Prophets are sufficient, and that, *"If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead."* (Luke 16:31)

On the surface, this parable is a warning of how we are to behave if we wish to truly bear God's fruits. On yet another level, it is possible to interpret Abraham's refusal of the man's request to resurrect Lazarus as a rebuke to the religious authorities of the time: they who clung to the letter of the Law while disregarding the Spirit of it would never be able to accept any of Christ's ministry—especially not His Resurrection.

Even so, I wish to turn to a little commented upon detail. The Rich Man is burning, his request for relief has been denied—and yet, the story does not end with his wailing or grumbling. Instead, he asks that his brothers be given an opportunity to repent. Even if we accept Abraham's reasoning, that the Law and the Prophets are sufficient to understand God's Will, let us pause to reflect that the Rich Man finally demonstrates concern for someone other than himself.

It is a great mystery that, even in the fires of Hades, he who could not be bothered to think of the condition of Poor Lazarus, is now moved to pity at the thought of his fellow man. A great ascetic, Evagrius of Pontus writes that, *"There was [a time] when evil did not exist, and there will be [a time] when it no longer exists; but there was never [a time] when virtue did not exist and there will never be [a time] when it does not exist: for the seeds of virtue are indestructible. And I am convinced by the rich man...who was condemned to hell because of his evil, and who felt compassion for his brothers. For to have pity is a very beautiful seed of virtue."*

Truly, we can take strength that showing compassion is an indestructible seed of virtue; a seed of virtue which demonstrates in our own failed, human imitation, the perfect nature of Christ.

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