

**The Twenty Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
**September 25, 2016**

The Gospel this Sunday continues the theme of our relationship with material possessions. Last week the Parable of the Unjust Steward made us think about the ways we need to be inventive in our approach to discipleship. And this Sunday with the Parable of the rich man and Lazarus we look at the theme of material versus spiritual wealth.

In his parables Jesus didn't usually give names to people but in today's reading we are told that the name of the poor man was Lazarus. When we look it up we shouldn't be surprised to find that the name Lazarus literally means, 'God is my help'.

And usually after telling a parable, Jesus would explain to his disciples what it meant; he gave them the moral of the story.

But not with this one, it just comes to an abrupt end. This is probably because the meaning was so clear.

Nor are we told that the rich man actually broke any of the commandments or did anything particularly wrong.

His sin was simply not noticing the poor man at his gate.

And that should bother us a little bit because Jesus implies that we can be condemned for simply not noticing what's going on around us.

One of Jesus favorite themes dealt with spiritual blindness and hypocrisy, but here he's reminding us that there is another less obvious kind of blindness...blindness to the situation of the people around us.

Jesus wants us to understand that we are required to look at the world through His eyes. God expects us to see things in a different way, he expects us to be sensitive to the things that are important to him.

And noticing the poor is only the *first* step. Once we've noticed them we have to do something about them; we have to react; we have to enter into a relationship with them.

Now that doesn't necessarily mean going out and giving them a big hug and inviting them into our home for a hot meal.

Although there are times when it might be appropriate to do exactly that.

But it means that in addition to giving them immediate help we have to look into the reasons why they are at our gate and how they came to be destitute in the first place.

And that means that we need to take issue with systems of injustice within our society or even within our hearts.

The message of Jesus isn't so much about providing us with a new set of moral rules and regulations but of giving us a new vision, a new set of eyes with which to look at the world.

Remember the message Jesus told his disciples to give to the people when he sent them out to preach in the towns and villages: *'The Kingdom of God is at hand.'*

As disciples, we need to adjust our eyes so that we can actually see that Kingdom. We should never call it 'the next world' or 'the hereafter' because that implies that the Kingdom of God is somewhere far off.

It's actually all around us and we are, because of our faith, already beginning to live that new life in the here and now.

The veil between heaven and earth is very thin and in places it's practically transparent.

We need to start noticing those places, we need to start transforming this world and make it more like the Kingdom so that in due time the two can actually become one.

This wonderful parable about the rich man and Lazarus is a wake-up call, it's meant to open our eyes to that other world which is the Kingdom of God and which has a whole different set of values and in which the past, present and future are made one.

It's meant to help us see that the Saints and Angels are all around us, that those who have already received their heavenly reward are very near and actively helping us. It's meant to help us to understand that love is the most powerful force in the universe and that prayer is the key to unlocking that power.

But it's also true that He expects us to give to others just as freely and generously, even when they don't deserve it -- to give them love and forgiveness, care and concern, *especially* when they don't deserve it.

So it would be wise to follow the advice of St. Augustine who said: "We must pray as if everything depended upon God and work as if everything depended upon us." But how can we do that if we're so busy trying to have it all and losing our ability to relate to other living human beings that we fail to see who's outside the front door of our hearts and homes?

If we can redirect our focus away from ourselves towards others, we'll be living the kind of life God wants us to live; we'll be living the kind of life Jesus lived; always in prayer and always aware of those in need.