



Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time September 26, 2010 C

THE GREAT REVERSAL OF FORTUNE

“My child, remember that you received what was good during your lifetime while Lazarus received what was bad; now he is comforted, whereas you are tormented.”

Lk 16:19-31

This weekend’s gospel is not a ‘nice’ gospel—not one of those make-you-feel-good gospels, but one that could make us very uncomfortable *if* we allow ourselves to listen to it.

Our first reaction might be “well, I am not rich like that guy in the story.” A lot of us would claim that we are not rich—that is, according to American standards. But compared to the millions of people worldwide who live in dire poverty, we are wealthy.

The gospel and the first reading present us with a series of *contrasts*: purple and linen clothes /sores; splendid feasts /scrapes; well-off /misery; consolation /torment; heaven / hell.

In the gospel, Jesus is not condemning wealth per se and he is certainly not saying that poverty is a blessing. The message he wants to put across is that in this life, those of us who are blessed materially have a big responsibility towards the Lazaruses of this world—whether they live far away or right in our own backyard.

How are we to respond as a nation, as a church, and individually?

As a nation. How generous are we as a nation to the poor countries of our world? We may not be as generous as we think. Some years ago, I read an article by the late Fr. Robert Drinan, S.J., professor at Georgetown University and former Congressman. In the article, he said that the United States had 4% of the world’s population but used 40% of its resources. *Proportionally*, our government’s foreign aid assistance to poor countries is less than the contributions from the other 23 donor nations. The key word here is “proportionally.”

The millionaire may have given a lot more to the poor than any of us, but in terms of percentages, the poor widow gave a lot more, as Jesus noted in his widow’s mite story.

As a church family. We also have a huge responsibility as a church family to share our resources with the Lazaruses of this world at home and abroad.

On an international level, *Catholic Relief Services* (CRS) represents the United States in eighty countries. It also represents our church, mainly at home, but sometimes abroad. The *Campaign for Human Development* (CHD) offers assistance to communities that are seeking to help the poor fish for themselves. Unfortunately, CHD’s good reputation has recently been tarnished for its apparent support of recipient agencies which might be involved in activities contrary to church teaching.

Ascension Parish. I believe that, as a parish, we can feel pretty good about our efforts to reach out to the poor at home and abroad. In the past several years, we have offered significant assistance to the poor in Liberia, Lima, Haiti, Jamaica, and Calcutta. (As financial aid was earmarked only for those communities I had a personal contact with, I can assure you that the money went to where it was supposed to go.) While charity may *begin* at home, it should never stop at home.

I am most grateful to all who volunteer in our *Thrift Store*, *Social Concerns*, *Daily Bread*, *Habitat for Humanity*, *Congregation for Community Action*, and *Community of Hope*. Daily or several times a week, the first three of the above-mentioned groups are on the front lines of Ascension’s outreach to the poor.

I am also grateful to *JustFaith* for helping to form the social conscience of all who participate in its formation programs.

Thrift Store. Our revenues help Social Concerns, tuition assistance to Ascension School, Youth Ministry, Pregnancy Outreach and many other ministries.

Social Concerns. This past year so far, 5,709 families came seeking help which equates to 13,385 people.

Daily Bread. Daily, about 200 to 250 individuals receive a freshly cooked meal.

The other above-mentioned outreach ministries also receive help from us to enable them to do their good work.

Parish tithes. This fiscal year, we will disburse about \$100,000 in assistance to hurting individuals and some ministries involved in helping the poor. In and through *special second collections*, parishioners will also help the Lazaruses of this world.

Individually. Insofar as we are in a position to help, all of us are called to be sensitive and responsive to the Lazaruses of this world. Obviously, none of us can solve all the problems of the world or of our local community. But all of us or nearly all of us can help. We all can light a candle, be it within our own family or the wider community. While I have no desire to put a guilt trip on anyone, as pastor of this wonderful church family, I would be seriously failing in my responsibility if I did not point out the serious responsibility all of us have to help the Lazaruses of this world. If we cannot give money, perhaps we can give our time and talent. If we are deaf to the cry of the poor, we will pay dearly for our deafness in the next life.

People say “facts are friendly.” But facts may also be unfriendly if we take the time to check them. We may find that while we may *think* we are quite generous to the poor, the *facts* show otherwise.

The rich man wakes up to late

In today’s gospel, the rich man wakes up to his responsibility to reach out to the poor when it is too late—too late for himself and too late to warn his family. The rich man asks if someone from the dead can speak to his family so they can repent. But he is told: “If they did not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone should rise from the dead.” Today’s gospel is intended to be a warning to you and me to heed Jesus’ Word on our responsibility to help the Lazaruses of this world. Let us pray that we hear and respond to that Word.

“When you look at human suffering concretely, you destroy all innocence, all neutrality, every attempt to say, ‘It wasn’t I; there was nothing I could do; I didn’t know.’ In the face of suffering you are either with the victim or the executioner—there is no other option.”

Dorothy Soelle

“The rich man did nothing to Lazarus, but he was not innocent. There are times when our innocence is our crime.”

Fr. Dennis McBride

Have a blessed week,

