

Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time C September 29, 2019

◆ 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’m 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.

In the Gospel, Jesus is not condemning wealth *per se* but neither is he 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.

Lazarus lives in our midst if we have eyes to see

Reflecting on today’s Gospel in 2007, Patricia Sanchez writes:

If we are to learn anything from today’s portion of the Word, it is that the poor are always with us, and, like Lazarus, are as near as our doorway. The poor live on our city streets and in our neighborhoods, as well as on the fringes of society. They can either call forth the best part of us or they can be ignored; the choice is ours, as are the consequences of our choosing. In order to attend properly to the poor, to ease their struggle and improve their lot, we are required not merely to practice charity but to exercise justice. Charity, however generous, is a temporary band-aid, a stopgap effort that quiets hunger pangs with an occasional handout. Justice, on the other

hand, is a purposeful, well-planned effort that tackles the problem at its root rather than merely relieving its symptoms. What the Lazaruses in our midst need, therefore, are frequent doses of charity followed by a long-term prophylactic of justice.

*But who are the Lazaruses among us? Walter Burghardt, S.J., insists that we need not look far to find them (Justice: A Global Adventure, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, N.Y.: 2004). **Lazarus lives** in the children of this world who are dying each day from war, hunger, abuse, neglect and diseases that could be easily prevented if their parents had the pennies needed to immunize them. **Lazarus lives** in the immigrants, refugees and otherwise displaced persons on this earth for whom the lack of appropriate documents or a valid address subjects them to immoral treatment that is unconscionable for Christians. **Lazarus lives** in the homeless, many of whom are mentally ill or emotionally scarred by their ordeal. **Lazarus also lives** in the homeless veterans of so many wars. According to the Veterans Administration, on any given night, more than 275,000 veterans sleep on the streets of our cities.*

*Lazarus also lives in those who languish in hospitals, convalescent and nursing homes where no one visits. Lazarus lives in those who suffer from Alzheimer’s, dementia and all those other diseases that rob people of their personalities, memories and dignity. **Lazarus lives** in people everywhere who are victims of torture and genocide. Lazarus lives and cries out, with what seems to be an unheard scream, in Darfur, Congo, Uganda, Brazil, South Africa.*

Burghardt offers a sound plan that begins with our remembrance that every Lazarus is a child of God, created in God’s image. For that very reason, and despite whatever disguise may dim that reflection, every Lazarus deserves my respect, my concern, my proactive care.

What we may not do, insists Burghardt, is turn our individual or collective backs upon our Lazaruses. We may not hide behind the excuse that they are illegal, inconvenient or too far away and too far gone to

warrant our help. Jesus took the initiative in reaching out to the foreigners, the sick, the sinners, the criminals and the otherwise disenfranchised of his society. If we who call ourselves his own do not do likewise, then our Christianity is a sham; our faith is a lie.

To keep our commitment to Christ real and practical, we are to revive the quality of caring that Jesus showed to all others. Nor should any of us forget that in that caring, and in all our sharing, God's grace is at work. The welcome that I give to a stranger, to an immigrant, says Burghardt, may well be the prelude to God's grace. It may be God's way of using my ordinary humanness to bring forth light, strength, peace and courage from another struggling human frame. If God cannot act through you and me to recognize the Lazaruses who live among us, then through whom will their needs be met?

(Used with permission The Word We Celebrate: Commentary on the Sunday Lectionary Years A, B, C, by Patricia Sanchez, Sheed & Ward Publisher, 9-1-89.)

Outreach to brothers and sisters at home and abroad in Melbourne and Uganda

All of you have heard the saying: "Charity begins at home." But you may not have heard its fuller version: "Charity begins at home, but should not remain at home."

The saying "Charity begins at home" could apply to needy family members and to the needy here in Melbourne. I assume most, if not all, of you know that we have a pretty extensive outreach to the needy in Melbourne.

Outreach to Uganda: "Charity begins at home, but should not remain at home" could be applied to our new outreach to Uganda. As you know, we belong to a global family and a universal church family.

I believe that my trip to Uganda last summer was providential. A chance or providential conversation with Fr. Sheedy last October led to my decision to go. It not only gave me a firsthand look at people living in dire poverty but *also* showed me the *huge* difference one parish the size of Ascension can and does make in one place. I think if every parish would follow what Blessed Trinity in Ocala is doing, what a huge difference that would make in the lives of many people. Parishes like Ascension could help to build places of worship, schools, clinics and more.

Concrete Suggestions

- ◆ Sponsor one or more grade school children (see next page for details).
- ◆ Fund the building of one classroom in an elementary school—\$5,000.

One other church family and I have given a donation of \$5,000 for this latter purpose. I would love it if some more parishioners would consider helping us with the building of a classroom.

Fr. Pat Sheedy, Pastor of Blessed Trinity in Ocala, who has been going to Uganda for 13 years, tells me that the goal is to have nine classrooms for each school—usually achieved in three phases. I think it's amazing that a nine-classroom school can be built for \$60,000. Fr. Sheedy has had individual pledges to build a school over a period of 5 years.

I am hoping that all of you who can sponsor one or more children will consider doing so. And I am hoping that some of you may be able to fund the building of one classroom. And maybe there is someone who can even fund the building of a school or church over a period of several years. Please pray about it. I totally believe giving donations to a cause like this will bring a great sense of joy to your heart.

A Simple Explanation of the Mass (and the Liturgical Year)

This past week, Matthew Kelly's organization Dynamic Catholic released my third book: *A Simple Explanation of the Mass*, a step-by-step commentary on *each* part of the Mass and the Seasons of the Liturgical Year.

Since the first edition of the book is in hard cover, it is expensive at \$20. Fortunately, since I am the author, I can buy it for a 60% discount which enables me to sell it for \$8. Sometime in the future, a soft cover edition will be issued. Copies of the book are now available at the office.

The book is dedicated to Maria Sittig, who has typed and retyped everything I have written since I came to the parish 18 years ago.

Some words of praise for the book. Tom Groome, Professor of Theology at Boston College, writes:

"Fr. Tobin's book on the Mass represents rich spiritual wisdom from the heat of the day, being the

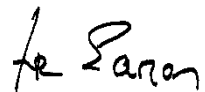
work of a long-time pastor in the trenches. Its down-to-earth explanations and practical suggestions will enhance our active participation in the Mass, enabling us to drink all the more deeply from the ever fresh waters of Word and Sacrament that spring up unto life eternal.”

Fr. Doug Doussan, a retired parish priest in New Orleans writes:

“A Simple Explanation of the Mass is a treasure. It is well written, highly informative on almost every aspect of the liturgical celebration, fosters a genuine liturgical spirituality, connects liturgy with daily life and the Gospel mission to the poor.”

I believe that if a *prayerful* person who does *not* attend Mass reads the book, they may well be motivated to return to the Eucharist. Do you know anyone like that?

Have a blessed week,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Fr. Doussan". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.