

Trinity I 2021

If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

**In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.
Amen**

This morning we have the well-familiar story of the Rich Man and Lazarus. Familiar to most, but only understood by a few. It is often mistakenly used as a lesson on Heaven and Hell, but it is really not about either one, at least, not as physical places. In keeping with the formula we're taught in English 101, "Tell them what you're gonna tell them" the theme is clearly about CONVERSION. That is, NOW is the time to convert, or get your house in order, because once we depart this life it is too late.

Sadly, this is what the rich man in Jesus' parable learns: That how we live our lives NOW has consequences for all eternity. There are riches that last into the next life and there are riches that are only for now.

Let's begin by looking at our two characters. The Rich Man who has no name, although he's been given names in later history such as *Dives* which simply means "rich" in Latin. By contrast, Lazarus is the only name given to anyone in Jesus' parables; it means *El-Azar* or "God has helped."

The story begins with a drastic reversal that happens after these two men die. In his lifetime, the rich man displayed his wealth with beautiful clothes and lavish feasts. Conversely, Lazarus was covered with sores, homeless, and hungry. After his death, Lazarus is carried away to an honoured place beside Abraham, while the rich man finds himself in Hades. The King James uses the word "Hell" but other translations use the word "Hades" or place of the dead. It is important to understand here that this is not the "Hell" that we think of where some will ultimately end up after the final judgment. It is a place of departed spirits. A "waiting" place if you will. It is not totally clear to even the most learned theologians. In fact, in seminary there is an entire theology or the study of "Eschatology" that tries to make sense of the afterlife.

We do know, as we see in today's parable, that there is a great gulf or "chasm" between where the rich man and Lazarus end up, in fact, it cannot be crossed as the rich man discovers when he asks for a sip of water.

Once the rich man realizes that he is completely lost, he seems to show some compassion for his family members still in this world. He begs Abraham to send Lazarus to his five brothers to warn them of

this awful place he has ended up. But notice, he still hasn't learned his lesson about care and respect for others. "Lazarus, bring me some water." "Lazarus, go warn my brothers." He is still very much concerned with himself and only those he wants to love.

Abraham's reply, "They've already had their warning: Moses and the prophets." This response is congruent with Luke's emphasis on the continuity between Jesus' teaching and that of Moses and the prophets. When the rich man maintains that his brothers will change if Lazarus goes to them, Abraham replies, "If they haven't listened to Moses and the prophets, they're not going to be convinced by someone being raised from the dead", an allusion perhaps to Jesus' resurrection.

The story centers on the reversal of fortunes that takes place after Lazarus and the rich man die. It links agony or comfort after death with how we treat the less fortunate around us, much like St.

Matthew's Gospel links eternal life and punishment with how we treat the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, etc. This reversal after death is ultimate.

Luke, in particular, stresses the way the status of the rich and poor is reversed in the Kingdom of God. When Jesus is conceived in Mary's

womb, she exults that “the hungry have been filled with good things while the rich have been sent empty away.” Likewise Jesus preaches frequently on the poor and the rich.

As this is not a sermon on the theology of heaven and hell, it is likewise not a condemnation of how much money one has. It is all about how that wealth is shared. Wealth can accomplish great things, and indeed, it does. Without the generosity of others, the Gospel could not be spread. And Jesus reminds those with more to share not only with their friends and loved ones but also the poor, the crippled, the blind, etc. In fact, Jesus describes the Kingdom of God as a wedding banquet where all are invited and not just a select few.

As I “told you what I was going to tell you” at the beginning, I now take you back there and ask that you take those words to heart. Right here and right now is the time for conversion. We have Moses and the Prophets, but more than that we have the Gospels. This is furthered by our encounter with the Risen Lord during every Mass. We have been blessed with material wealth and spiritual wealth. Let us share both as we heed the words of our Lord and look forward to our ultimate life with him in the Kingdom.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

Amen.