



September 29, 2019 26th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Moreover, between us and you a great chasm is established... Luke 16:25

Dear Friends;

St. Theophan said *“Throw out of your head the idea that you can, through a comfortable life, become what you must be in Christ.”* Greek Orthodox Fr. John Chryssavgis says that saints and mystics have always understood that there is a connection between the discipline of denying oneself and our communion in Christ. Those who are not able to control their need for more—that is, to say “enough” when their own basic needs are met—are not so likely to respond when a neighbor does not have enough. Fr. Chryssavgis writes, *“The tragedy is not just that the rich may never make it into heaven, but also that they may never understand why heaven is beyond their reach.”* This is certainly the case for the rich man in Jesus’ parable about poor Lazarus.

In the parable, Jesus contrasts a rich man and poor man. First, we notice the poor man has a name, Lazarus. Normally there are no names in parables, the characters are symbolic. That Lazarus has a name contrasts with the obsession of the rich to make for them a “name.” Lazarus is obviously poor. He lies at the gate of the nameless rich man. Lazarus is probably crippled. He is covered in sores. This impurity is made worse by the fact that wild dogs licked his wounds. It appears he cannot even beg. The listeners of Jesus would have thought Lazarus cursed by God. This is because of his loss of social status. And worse he does not even try to regain status.

In contrast, the wealthy man has the best of everything and more than he needs. He is blessed with a surplus. The Old Testament (Torah and the prophets) do not have a problem with wealth. But these scriptures also expect that surplus wealth ought to be shared with others. The wealthy are called to become patrons of the poor. When they do not share they are rightfully condemned as greedy. This what the Prophet Amos does in our first reading. The problem with greed is it never lets your vision go beyond your individual self.

Lazarus is at the front gate of the rich man’s house. The greedy man makes no effort to help Lazarus. It is as if he does not see Lazarus. Later, when the rich man is in the abode of the dead, he calls out to Abraham. Abraham points out the chasm between them. That abyss did not just happen after death. The rich man put it there in this life. In his greed he did nothing to relieve poor Lazarus. It is a chasm of selfishness that is between them.

And the foolish greedy man never understands. He appeals to his privilege through his blood connections, *“Father Abraham I’m one of the family.”* Next he orders Lazarus like a slave to wait on him, *“Tell him to bring me some water! I am in torment!”* *“Oh he can’t? Then send him to warn my family.”* The stinging conclusion is the greedy fool had available to him the knowledge of what he should do. He had the wisdom of the Law and the Prophets. And he ignored it. Sadly his family will do the same, even if someone came back from the dead.

Today, we as Church, celebrate the **World Day of Migrants and Refugees**. The Church has been commemorating this day since 1914. It is an occasion for us to become aware of those people vulnerable and on the move, which are at our gate. The theme that Pope Francis chose for this year is **“It is not just about migrants.”** The world is much smaller now and the poor Lazarus at our gate may not be from our neighborhood but from Central America, Mexico, Syria or Yemen.

Like the greedy man we cannot place a chasm between them and us. Pope Francis challenges us, *“The most economically advanced societies are witnessing a growing trend towards extreme individualism which...is producing a ‘globalization of indifference.’ In this scenario migrants, refugees, displaced persons and victims of trafficking have become emblems of exclusion...they are often looked down upon and considered the source of society’s ills. That attitude is an alarm bell warning of the moral decline we will face if we continue to give ground to the throw-away culture...For this reason, the presence of migrants and refugees—and of vulnerable people in general—is an invitation to recover some of those essential dimensions of our Christian existence and our humanity that risks being overlooked in a prosperous society. That is why it is not just about migrants.”*

For the Pope’s complete message, for other reflections, and to learn what you can do visit **migrants-refugees.va** The USA is a rich man, may God give us the eyes to see the poor Lazarus knocking at our own door!

Peace,

Fr Ron

Esta carta está en español en el sitio web: www.stannechurchbyron.com