

September 25, 2022  
26th Sunday in Ordinary Time  
Luke 16:19-31

Jesus said to the Pharisees: “There was a rich man who dressed in purple garments and fine linen and dined sumptuously each day. And lying at his door was a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who would gladly have eaten his fill of the scraps that fell from the rich man’s table. Dogs used to come and lick his sores.”

“When the poor man died, he was carried away by angels to the bosom of Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried, and from the netherworld, where he was in torment, he raised his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. And he cried out, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me. Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in the water and cool my tongue, for I am suffering torment in these flames.’

“Abraham replied, ‘My child, remember that you received what was good during your lifetime while Lazarus likewise received what was bad; but now he is comforted here, whereas you are tormented. Moreover, between us and you a great chasm is established to prevent anyone from crossing who might wish to go from our side to yours or from your side to ours.’

“He said, ‘Then I beg you, father, send him to my father’s house, for I have five brothers, so that he may warn them, lest they too come to this place of torment.’ But Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the prophets. Let them listen to them.’ He said, ‘Oh no, father Abraham, but if someone from the dead goes to them, then they will repent.’ Then Abraham said, ‘If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone should rise from the dead.’”

### **Background:**

In last week’s gospel, Jesus told the parable of the steward who reduced the debt of his master’s debtors. That gospel ends with Jesus telling the disciples, “No servant can serve two masters. He will either hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and mammon.” (Luke 16:13) In the verses that follow that text, Luke records three short teachings of Jesus that focus on the proper attitude toward wealth and the temporal world. Following those teachings, Jesus tells the parable of the rich man and Lazarus that is the text for this week.

Those who lived in the time of Jesus experienced an everyday world in which the resources seemed limited, and their experience suggested that these resources had been already distributed according to God’s plan. An unexpected surplus was not to be hoarded, or even saved for a time of need. It was needed now, and it should be redistributed to those in need. There was also a suspicion that unusual prosperity might actually be the property of another gotten through trickery or an inappropriate manner. You might remember the shepherd and the widow from the gospel two weeks ago, who gather the community to help celebrate the finding of what was lost. They make sure everyone knows that it is their property that has been found, and by joining in the celebration, the rest give their approval. Like those who join in the celebration of the return of the younger son, they lose the right to criticize the father for how he handled the situation.

This attitude toward temporal possessions was supported in their understanding of their relationship to Yahweh. They were Yahweh's chosen people. It was not as an individual but as a people that they enjoyed the favor of Yahweh. They inherited their relationship with Yahweh, and they were responsible to use the gifts of God not just for oneself but for the welfare of all. The need to care for the poor, the widow, and the stranger was not out of compassion, but out of the right use of God's gifts. Part of the scandal of the prodigal son is that he goes off to a foreign land to squander not only the wealth of his father, but also the wealth that was given to the community by Yahweh. How one used one's possessions was more important in this society than accumulating the wealth. Situations like being a widow or an orphan left one in dire need, but those were not understood as being permanent conditions. The individual and the community both had a role to play in changing the situation. The widow could marry again, and the community had a responsibility in finding her a husband. Think of the seven brothers who married the same woman. (Matthew 22:24-25)

The parable itself is worthy of a few comments. Central to the parable is reversal of roles. The two men live lives that could not be more opposite. When death comes, the statuses are still polar opposites, but they are now reversed. In the first part, Lazarus is described as lying at the gate of the rich man. He is not a leper, since he is permitted inside the city, but his condition is so dire that scavenger dogs lick at his sores. (Even the dogs lick the wounds in a gesture of trying to offer healing and comfort.) But he is not begging, he is not trying to change his situation, nor is he inviting the rich man to respond to his situation. He is ritually unclean, but more importantly, he is unclean in the *reality of his existence*. Lazarus' state is totally deplorable. The rich man for his part is described as totally decadent. His house, his clothing, and his daily table are like those of an important feast. There is so much food that even the scraps that fall to the floor would be sufficient to satisfy Lazarus' hunger.

Lazarus' situation is so deplorable that people of the day might easily assume that his situation is the result of being cursed by God for sins that he or one of his ancestors committed. The true reality is revealed in the second part of the parable. Both men are known to Abraham, they are both a part of God's chosen people. Both share in God's covenant, and that covenant creates a relationship between them. But the rich man ignores that relationship and its responsibility. The fact that he can name Lazarus indicates that he recognizes him and was aware of his presence at his gate. In death, their positions are reversed, but the distance between them continues. "Moreover, between us and you a great chasm is established to prevent anyone from crossing who might wish to go from our side to yours or from your side to ours." (Luke 16:26)

### **Reflection Questions:**

1. What is your attitude toward wealth?
2. Are you aware of times when your personal wealth or lack of it has been a barrier in your relationship with another?
3. Are there times when your personal wealth has helped you cross barriers and enter into relationships with others?
4. Do you know people who are particularly good at forming relationships across barriers that might separate people? What about them seems to permit that to happen?

5. What is the most difficult barrier for you to cross in your relationships with others? What happens to you when you let the barrier be more powerful than your desire to cross that barrier?
6. Do you believe that all creation comes from God, is sustained by God, and will return to God?
7. Do you believe that in the next life those who have suffered in this world are more likely to find God's favor in heaven?
8. Have you ever talked to God about your hopes and/or fears of life after death?
9. When you hear Abraham describe the great chasm that separates Lazarus and the rich man, what happens within you? Are you aware of chasms in your life?
10. Abraham addresses the rich man as "my child." What does that say to you?
11. Why is it that Abraham is able to welcome the poor man as his companion in heaven?
12. As you read this gospel, what feelings or questions arose within you? Can you take some time to bring those to God?

The gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to [annemarie.lom@gmail.com](mailto:annemarie.lom@gmail.com)

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### **Excerpts from the readings for September 25, 2022, the Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Thus says the Lord: Woe to the complacent in Zion!  
Stretched comfortably on their couches,  
they eat lambs taken from the flock, and calves from the stall!  
Improvising to the music of the harp, they devise their own accompaniment.  
They drink wine from bowls and anoint themselves with the best oils;  
yet they are not made ill by the collapse of Joseph!  
Therefore, now they shall be the first to go into exile,  
and their wanton revelry shall be done away with.

*Praise the Lord, my soul!*

*Blessed he who keeps faith forever, secures justice for the oppressed, and gives food to the hungry.*

*The Lord sets captives free, gives sight to the blind, and raises up those who were bowed down; the Lord loves the just and protects strangers.*

*The fatherless and the widow he sustains, but the way of the wicked he thwarts.*

*The Lord shall reign forever; your God, O Zion, through all generations. Alleluia.*

But you, man of God, pursue righteousness, devotion, faith, love, patience, and gentleness. Compete well for the faith. Lay hold of eternal life, to which you were called when you made the noble confession in the presence of many witnesses.

I charge you before God and Christ Jesus,  
to keep the commandment without reproach until the appearance of our Lord,  
that the blessed and only ruler will make manifest the Lord of lords,  
who alone has immortality, and who dwells in unapproachable light.  
To him be honor and eternal power. Amen.

Jesus said: "Lying at a rich man's door was a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who would gladly have eaten his fill of the scraps that fell from the rich man's table. When the poor man died, he was carried away by angels to the bosom of Abraham. The rich man also died, and from the netherworld, where he was in torment, he saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. He cried out, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me. Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am suffering in these flames.'

Abraham replied, 'Remember that you received good during your lifetime while Lazarus received what was bad; but now he is comforted here, whereas you are tormented. Moreover, between us and you a great chasm is established to prevent anyone from crossing.' He said, 'I beg you, send him to my father's house, so that he may warn my five brothers.' But Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the prophets. Let them listen to them.' He said, 'Father Abraham, if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' Abraham said, 'If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone should rise from the dead.'"

**Excerpts from Amos 6:1, 4-7; Psalm 146:7-10; 1 Timothy 6:11-16; and Luke 16:19-31**

**From Joe:**

Friends,

Here are the gospel background and reflection questions for September 25th, as prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. The gospel from Luke is the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, the poor man who sat at the rich man's door, and the way their fortunes are reversed after they die. From afar the rich man first asks Abraham to send Lazarus to him with some relief, and, failing that, he then asks Abraham to send Lazarus to his five living brothers, with a warning. Abraham's response to the first request is that a crossing is impossible, prevented by a great chasm. And to the second request, that Lazarus be sent to warn the brothers,

Abraham replies, "If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone should rise from the dead."

The other readings also have references to proper conduct, and to the need for care instead of complacency. In the first reading from Amos, thus says the Lord: "Woe to the complacent. Lying comfortably, they are not made ill by the collapse of Joseph. Their wanton revelry shall be done away with." Psalm 146 acclaims, "Blessed is he who secures justice for the oppressed, and gives food to the hungry. The Lord raises up those who were bowed down. The way of the wicked he thwarts." In the second reading, from the first letter to Timothy, Paul writes, "Man of God, pursue righteousness, and love, and gentleness. Keep the commandment, until the appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Joe