

HOMILY for 26th SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME – Year C

A tightwad was convinced by a friend to buy a couple of tickets in the state lottery. But after he won the big prize, he didn't seem quite happy. "What's wrong?" the friend asked. "You just became a millionaire!"

"I know," he groaned. "But, I can't imagine why I bought that second ticket!"

Anyway, I'm sure we've heard the story of the rich man and Lazarus in today's Gospel before. On the appearance, it might look like God seems to favor the poor over the rich. We've come to that conclusion based on the exchange like this one between Abraham & the rich man in today's Gospel.

The rich man called out, "Father Abraham, have pity on me. Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water to refresh my tongue, for I am tortured in these flames."

"My child," replied Abraham, "remember that you were well off in your lifetime, while Lazarus was in misery. Now, he has found consolation here, but you have found torment."

It seems like Abraham feels sorry for Lazarus & tries to make up for all the sufferings that he had to endure on earth. Abraham evidently would do everything possible to bring Lazarus comfort & make his life in Heaven much satisfactory & fulfilling. For poor Lazarus had to endure a miserable life on earth & lacked a lot of things including food & housing. His frail body was full of sores & painful wounds. He evidently could not afford to go to the hospital & take care of his wounds. The only one who cared about him & came to lick his sores was a dog. This dog was his only friend & comforter. Meanwhile, the rich man dressed well & feasted sumptuously every day. He enjoyed a good life & had a lot of servants to comfort & take care of him. That might be the case for him on earth. But in the next life, he would need all the help that he could get. For he could not bring along all of his servants & earthly possessions. Unfortunately, no one in the next world seemed to give him any sympathy & listen to his pleading.

I don't know about you, but this is where the story of the rich man & Lazarus gets interesting. It's no longer the story of the rich & the poor, which we've heard a lot about every day here on earth. Instead, it has turned into a story of a person without compassion for others & another one looking for help. The reason why the rich man's pleading does not go anywhere in the next world is because he did not have a compassionate heart in this life. He did not show any pity for poor Lazarus here on earth. That attitude was not left behind after his death. But, it followed him unto the next life. That's why the rich man could not get Abraham to listen to his pleas & show him any compassion. He could not get Abraham to give him some water to cool him down in his current burning place. Neither could he convince Abraham to send someone to his remaining brothers in this world and warn them to change their current lifestyle. So, the attitude and character that a person develops in this life will follow him/her to the next life. That's why we've heard the saying, "What goes around comes around!" That's exactly what we've seen happening to the rich man. His uncaring attitude and unmerciful character followed him to the next life and haunted him there.

In case we could not see the truth about that saying, today's First Reading gives us another example to help us understand it better. Here's how the First Reading warns us: "Woe to the complacent in Zion! Lying upon beds of ivory, stretched comfortably on their couches; they eat lambs taken from the flock & calves from the stall! Improvising to the music of the

harp, they devise their own accompaniment. They drink wine from the bowls & anoint themselves with the best oils... Therefore, now they shall be the first to go into exile, & their wanton revelry shall be done away with." I don't think prophet Amos wanted to condemn people who enjoy a comfortable life as we just heard in today's First Reading. Rather, he warned those people from relying on that lifestyle too much & forgetting about a life of virtues & caring for their neighbors. Otherwise, the Judgment Day would come down upon them & turn their current lifestyle upside down. It might be too late for them to turn their lives around if they don't change before that day.

In today's Second Reading, St. Paul shares the same feeling about the importance of working on the life of virtues on earth & says, "People of God that you are, seek after integrity, piety, faith, love, steadfastness, & a gentle spirit. Fight the good fight of faith. Take firm hold on the everlasting life to which you were called when, in the presence of many witnesses, you made your noble profession of faith... I charge you to keep God's command without blame or reproach until our Lord Jesus Christ shall appear." So, St. Paul wants to remind us to follow a life of virtues & avoid seeking after other worldly things as the people of God. He calls on us to reject the uncaring lifestyle & unmerciful attitude of the rich. Otherwise, we'd be treated in the same way after this life. If we don't believe that, we can ask the rich man in today's Gospel.

My dear brothers & sisters, God does not hate the rich or resent the amount of wealth that they might possess. But, God does not take it well if they don't have a caring & compassionate heart toward their neighbors, especially the poor. They might get away with an uncaring lifestyle & an unmerciful attitude in this life. But, God will not let that happen in the next life. So, we better prepare for it by practicing a life of virtues & learning to treat everyone with care & compassion. If we do that, God will treat us the same way in the next life.