

My Brothers and Sisters,

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus, which is found only in Luke's Gospel, is one of the most interesting and challenging parables.

First, this parable is the only parable of Jesus where a character is given a name. However, we should note that only one of the two characters is given a name. It seems to me that we can interpret this in two ways. Whose names do we typically know? We typically know the names of the rich and famous, not the names of the homeless or beggars. This parable suggests once again that God's way are not our ways, and our ways are not God's ways. This parable challenges us to make God's ways our ways.

At the same time, the name Lazarus is derived from the Hebrew name Eleazar which means "God has helped." I would suggest that Jesus gives the poor man a name to personalize him. On the contrary, the rich man is not named. Over the centuries commentators on this parable have given him the name *Dives*, a Latin word which means "rich man." Therefore, Lazarus is personalized and thus humanized whereas the rich man is not individualized and therefore encompasses all who are rich.

Rich, of course, is a relative term. The problem is that most of us do not think of ourselves as wealthy, and by American standards of wealth we are not wealthy. However, all of us are wealthy compared to some people in our country and to most people throughout the world. Therefore, the parable applies to all of us.

The parable does not tell us anything about the moral character of Lazarus or the rich man. It does not tell us that Lazarus lived a morally good life or that the rich man lived a morally bad life. It simply tells us that the rich man lived a really rich life dressed in purple garments and fine linen and eating sumptuously every day. On the other hand, Lazarus was poor, covered with sores, and would have been happy to eat the scraps that fell from the rich man's table, implying that he did not receive them.

Why then did the rich man end up in hell? What was his sin? If we read the parable superficially, we might conclude that his sin was not feeding Lazarus and not providing care for his sores. However, I would argue that his sin was that he did not even notice Lazarus. He probably saw him with his eyes but never really noticed him. In other words, Lazarus was not part of his world and therefore never merited his attention. In today's first reading, God, through the Prophet Amos, paints a picture of the lifestyle of the rich. However, God says to them, "*Woe to the complacent...*" In other words, woe to those who are satisfied as long as their life is comfortable. Woe to those who are self-satisfied. Woe to those who are satisfied with the status quo for others.

The truth is that most of us, including me, live in bubbles. We live surrounded by people like ourselves. Of course, we know that there are people who are poor in all kinds of ways, but they never enter enough into our field of vision for us to be concerned enough to take action on their behalf. In the past, we could excuse ourselves. However, with today's media, we can see poverty and its effects not only here in our country but throughout the world: people who starve to death, people who lack water or clean water, people who die from treatable diseases, the victims of war, the victims of oppression, the victims of sex trafficking.

My brothers and sisters, Jesus wants us to be compassionate or merciful. To be compassionate or merciful, we first have to see the needs of others, not just the needs of those like us, but also the needs of those who are very unlike us, but who like us are also sons and daughters of God.