

I Trinity 2020
Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish
Father Craig Looney
I St. John 4.7-21 St. Luke 16.19-31
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Here's a story that should make everyone here today smile...it's a true story...and it happened to me. It all started with a simple act of kindness by a stranger I never met...and it is something I will never forget.

Last week I was hungry for a calorie-laden meal from a popular fast-food restaurant. When I drove up to the window to pay, the young man at the window told me the guy in the car in front of me paid for my meal...and handed me the receipt. Yes...that was my meal...paid for in full!

The young man sensed my confusion. He went on to tell me the guy in front of me had his meal paid for by the guy in front of him...and did I want to keep the "chain" going. Yes...I will do that...and paid for the meal of the person in the car behind mine. Unexpected acts of kindness...between complete strangers!

Today's Gospel is a parable about kindness and compassion, love and mercy, how we treat each other, and the four last things we normally talk about during the Advent Season...death, judgment, heaven and hell. It's a rich man-poor man story.

The rich man in the parable dressed in the most expensive clothes, lived in a luxurious mansion and ate the best food. The poor man, Lazarus, was brought to the rich man's door, hoping the rich man would throw him some scraps of food. To make matters worse, the poor man was covered with open sores, the only comfort he received was the dogs that came and licked his sores. He was an outcast in every sense of the word.

The poor man died and was carried by angels to sit beside Abraham, free of his illness. The rich man died and took up residence in a place where he endured unspeakable torment. Many First Century Jews believed wicked dead went to a place called Sheol...the good dead went to sit beside Abraham in Paradise. Most Christians understand Jesus is talking about Heaven and Hell.

There are some important lessons we learn from the story. Jesus is clearly saying Heaven and Hell are real places...not states of mind. The chasm that exists between the two is exactly that...there is no bridge between Heaven and Hell...there is no two-way traffic. And how we treat others during this lifetime will be a major factor in determining where we will spend eternity.

Jesus expects us to help those in need whenever and in whatever way we are able. The rich man in the story ignored the serious plight of the poor man. There are consequences when we ignore someone in need. To love God is to love each other...to love each other is to love God. We reject God's love when we refuse to help someone in need when we have the means to help them.

In recent weeks we have all been subjected to images on nightly newscasts of people behaving badly toward each other. We have also seen many other people rise to the occasion and reach out to help others, sometimes risking their own health. We hear them use the word "love" to mean "actively helping" others. Christian love is more than a word...it is an action!

We all make choices in life...to do what is good and right and embrace the love of God...or to do what is not good and not right and embrace a self-centered love that excludes our duty to love others. Failure to love others is failure to love God.

The choice of going to heaven or hell is ultimately up to us. The rich man didn't think the poor man was important enough or worthy of his attention. What he did by ignoring the poor man was the same as saying God wasn't important enough or worthy of his attention. He made the wrong choice in loving his wealth more than helping a poor, sick, man.

Kindness and compassion, love and mercy, and how we treat each other are at the heart of today's Gospel. Let's think about how we can best put the Gospel into action today.

It can be as simple as buying a stranger a meal at a drive-thru!

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