

I Trinity 2021

Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish

Father Craig Looney

I St. John 4.7-21 St. Luke 16.19-31

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God is LOVE...Saint John tells us...and whoever loves God must love his brother also.

Jesus is asked which is the Greatest Commandment. The first, he said, is to love God above all else; the second commandment is to love our neighbor in the same way we want to be loved.

We hear Jesus' command to love God and love others summarized at the beginning of every Mass. The operative word here is COMMAND. Jesus' mandate to love God and love our neighbors...which is everyone...is a must do!

The kind of love Jesus is talking about in the Great Commandment is the highest form of love...the love of God for man and the love of man for God. It is the unconditional love the Greek word *agape* describes. *Agape* is not a love based on feelings or emotions...it is love in action...regardless of our feelings or emotions.

This morning's Gospel is the Story of the Rich Man and Lazarus. The rich man is often referred to as Dives...from the word *dives* in the Vulgate...St. Jerome's 4th Century Latin Translation of the Bible. Dives simply means "a wealthy person". The Gospel is concerned with the second commandment...how we show *agape* love to others...and the potential consequences of our failure to do so.

Jesus has taken a popular story that circulated among Jews about the relationship between riches now and rewards in heaven...and added his own twist to the story. Our material wealth now doesn't equate with riches in heaven. What matters is what we do with the blessings God has given us now.

The rich man in the story lived in a large house, wore the most expensive clothes, and had more food on his table than he could possibly have eaten. Consider what we have on our own tables at Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter. What about the leftovers?

The poor man, Lazarus, had sores all over his legs, which made it difficult for him to walk. Friends brought him to the rich man's door,

where he hoped to eat just some of the leftovers from the rich man's extravagant feast. To add insult to injury...Lazarus would have been an outcast. Poverty and disease were considered God's judgment against him. But the name Lazarus means "God helps"...another twist to the story.

Lazarus dies and we have the wonderful image in the Gospel of angels carrying him to sit next to Abraham at the great feast in heaven. What about the rich man? When he dies he finds himself in hell. He is in great pain and can barely see Abraham off in the distance. When he asks for help, Abraham tells him he had everything he ever wanted and Lazarus had nothing. Now Lazarus has everything he could have hoped for, and more.

The Gospel is about the consequences of ignoring someone in need or failing to show a simple act of kindness when the opportunity presents itself. To love God is to love each other...to always act in the best interests of others. We reject God's love when we refuse to help someone in need when we have the means to help them.

Hell is a real place of eternal separation from God's love and the love of our family and friends enjoying everlasting life in heaven. God never sends anyone to hell...he wants us to enjoy life everlasting with him in heaven. To reject God's love is to choose hell.

The rich man didn't think Lazarus was important enough or worthy of his attention. What he did by ignoring the poor beggar was the same as saying God wasn't important enough or worthy of his attention either. He made a bad choice.

The Great Commandment to love God above everything else and to love our neighbors in the same way we want to be loved is the Christian imperative. We want to show our love for others who are less fortunate, because that shows God how much we love him.

Saint James tells us it isn't enough for us to hear and talk about God's love...we must put love into action. He tells us to take care of widows and orphans...that really means help anyone who needs food, clothing or anything else.

God is love...to love him is to love others.

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