

I Trinity 2022  
Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish  
Father Craig Looney  
*1 St. John 4.7-21 St. Luke 16.19-31*  
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Today's Gospel is a rich man-poor man story. It's about kindness and compassion, love and mercy and how we treat each other. And it's about the four last things we normally talk about during the Advent Season...death, judgment, heaven and hell.

Jesus doesn't identify the rich man by name. He had come to be known as Dives...a Latin word referring to a ridiculously wealthy man who likes to flaunt his wealth. Jesus does identify the poor man by name...Lazarus. It is the only parable of Jesus in which he identifies a character by name.

Saint Jerome believed the story of the rich man and Lazarus isn't a parable. He believed Jesus was talking about two living men...the rich man and Lazarus. Most Biblical scholars believe the story is a parable Jesus uses to reinforce the idea how we treat others does matter! Regardless...the message is the same.

The Story of Dives and Lazarus became a popular English Folk Ballad in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. It was often sung at Christmas and was considered a Christmas Carol. The words of the Ballad went through many changes over the centuries. It was sung so often by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century it became extinct is rarely heard today.

In the Gospel...Jesus describes the rich man dressed in the most expensive clothes and living in great luxury. The poor man, Lazarus, was covered with gaping sores. Dogs came and licked his sores. Lazarus would have been and outcast...because he was poor and sick. Jesus tells us he was brought to the rich man's door hoping to get a scrap of food. Lazarus was in such bad shape he couldn't even walk.

In the Folk Ballad...Dives goes out of his way to make life even worse for Lazarus. He makes fun of Lazarus begging for food and his open sores. And it is Dives who has his own dogs overpower Lazarus and lick his sores. Dogs were considered dirty and hung around garbage dumps. It was a final act of humiliation for Lazarus.

We know how the parable ends. The poor man dies and is carried by angels to Heaven free of his illness. The rich man dies and takes up residence in Hell where he endures unspeakable torment. There is an important lesson we learn from the ending of the story. Jesus clearly says Heaven and Hell are real places. Where we end up has a lot to do with how we treat others now.

If we were in a similar situation as Lazarus...wouldn't we want someone to reach out and help us? Jesus expects us to help those in need in whatever way we are able. 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.

Jesus doesn't expect us to solve the world's hunger and homeless problems. But he does expect us to do everything we can to make life easier for those in need. Our primary outreach is CALL Primrose. Our Annual Thanksgiving Contribution does make a difference...it helps CALL feed thousands of people. Many of us have other charities we contribute to...we need to continue helping even in these trying times.

Death and judgment can't be avoided. But the choice of going to heaven or hell is ultimately up to us. The rich man in the Gospel ended up in self-imposed exile in hell because he chose to ignore Lazarus. Wealth was the rich man's god...it didn't help him in the end. He missed every opportunity to put into practice the Great Commandment to love God and love others.

The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus is hard to read. It tugs at the heart and we want to do more to help others. Let's think about how we can best put into practice the Gospel imperative to show kindness and compassion, love and mercy in our lives.

It really does matter how we treat others!  
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