

Ordinary 26C - 2025

Why punishment for the innocent?

Naturally, we are tempted to ask the question, why was the rich man punished? The answer is, because he continued to commit the sin of omission, unresponsiveness to misery around him, although he drove neither the poor beggar nor the stray dogs from in front of his door and did not prevent either from sharing the discarded crumbs and leftovers from his table. He did not kick Lazarus. He was not cruel to him. The sin of the rich man was that **he never noticed Lazarus as a human being and a brother**. Lazarus represents a fact of life: the poor, the sick, and the unfortunate who are always around us. The rich man did no wrong, but he did nothing good, either. He was oblivious. He neither recognized Lazarus who was right there outside his gate, nor did he understand his God-commanded obligation in charity and justice to help him! In the Catholic teaching, not doing what one is supposed to do is a sin of omission, while doing what is forbidden is a sin of commission. The Fathers of the Church find three culpable omissions in the life of the rich man in the parable.

- a) He neglected the poor beggar at his door by not helping him to treat his illness or giving him a small house to live in.
- b) He ignored the scrolls of Sacred Scriptures kept on his table reminding him of Yahweh's commandment in the book of Lv (15:7-11) *"Don't deny help to the poor. Be liberal in helping the widows and the homeless."*
- c) He led a life of luxury and self-indulgence, totally ignoring the poor people around him, with Cain's attitude: *"Am I the guardian of my brother?"* It is not wrong to be rich, but it is wrong not to share our blessings with our less fortunate brothers and sisters.
- d) He forgot the truth that money is an instrument that can buy everything but happiness and can purchase a ticket to every place but Heaven.
- e) Although he was greatly blessed with much by way of comfort and enjoyed a life of luxury, his response to his blessedness was serious social blindness and insensitivity to both the needs of the poor and suffering around him and to genuine justice.

The Man Who Dies Rich

Andrew Carnegie, who amassed a fortune of over 400 million dollars ended up giving 99.5% of it away. He said this about it - "the man who dies rich, dies disgraced."

There is power in a name The Rev. Andrew Chappell

Now, in most societies, the following has historically been true—It's not what you know, it's who you know. And typically, the WHO you know has been the wealthy, the powerful, the intelligent, the well-to-do. But Jesus turns this notion upside down, illustrating that if you are to know anyone, it should be the poor! How does Jesus do this? He tells a story that

demonstrates the unimportance of the current cultural status symbols dictating who is great and who is not, who is blessed and who is cursed. Riches no longer matter (in fact, they may actually hurt you in the long run). Jesus also gives us a practical step concerning how to begin our status-less journey. He does so very simply in that only one of the two main characters— the rich man and the poor man—is actually named. We know the poor man's name: Lazarus. Why is that important? The leveling of status begins with knowing the name. Think about it. When you know someone's name, you begin a relationship. There is an attachment that happens. There is a responsibility that occurs (that's why pet adoption agencies give you the name of the puppy you're holding—once you know the name, there is a responsibility attached and you may be taking that dog home.)

The Trouble with Generalization

Whenever we generalize people -- the poor, the rich, the elderly, teenagers, the clergy, the laity, etc., we dehumanize them. I was visiting a large church when I heard one of the members state that he didn't like women pastors. This surprised me. I asked him, "What about Sally?" Sally was one of the three clergy at the church. "Oh, Sally...she's different!" was the reply. This female clergy had a name -- and with that, a relationship with this member. That, I think, was the difference.

We may be tempted to generalize the rich -- since so few of us belong to that category. The rich man is not named, but he is also not condemned for being rich, but for his indifference and uncaring attitude towards poor Lazarus right outside his door. Remember that Abraham was wealthy, and he isn't in the place of torment. (by Brian Stoffregen from Exegetical Notes) At Yad Vashem—the Israeli Holocaust Museum and Memorial, there is a separate memorial to the children who were killed in the holocaust. The memorial is simple. The room is filled with darkness and lights that look like stars on a clear night. And every few seconds, a voice comes through hidden speakers for a few seconds and then disappears, and then reappears and disappears again. Over and over, every few seconds. All the voice says are the names of the children killed in the holocaust. One at a time. Again and again.

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