

“Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.”

(Matt:25:40)



### Reflection:

Our reflection focuses on the parable of the rich man and Lazarus wherein Jesus reveals yet another aspect of God's mercy as well as what we may say “the opposite of mercy” or a situation where mercy seems very far away.

Anything valuable is more appreciated when it is missing or when it is replaced by something opposite. The parable for our reflection has two scenes; first the rich man and Lazarus in this world and the second, the rich man, Abraham and Lazarus in the next world. In the first scene, the opulence and luxurious life style of the rich man is contrasted to the lowly and pitiful existence of the beggar Lazarus. One striking contrast is that while the rich man in all his splendor does not have a name to identify, the poor beggar has a name, Lazarus, in fact the only name recorded in all of Jesus' parables. The rich man who lived like a king is destined to anonymity, while the poor man has a name that is recorded for eternity.

In the two scenes there is a clear reversal of situations: during his earthly life the rich man feasted every day while not even the leftovers from his table were given to Lazarus. In the next life, Lazarus is comforted while the rich man does not even have a drop of water to wet his lips.

The contrast between all the previous parables that we reflected on and the parable of the rich man and Lazarus is enormous. Until now, every request for compassion and mercy has been granted, from the total forgiveness of the two debtors to the supplication of the prodigal son. Again we see requests are granted to the persistent widow and to the tax collector in the temple. The rich man's request – “Have mercy on me” (Luke 16:24), seems to go unanswered. The situation is irreversible. This brings a question – how can any situation be irreversible given the infinite mercy of God? Why is the rich man's prayer not able to modify his condition even a tiny bit?

When the rich man is in Hades and sees Lazarus in Abraham's bosom, he recognizes him and calls him by name twice. He thus condemns himself through his own words. He knew exactly who Lazarus was during his earthly life, but he had always ignored him. The key reason why the rich man's situation cannot be remedied is because compassion is possible in this life while the poor man lies covered in sores at the rich man's gates; later or in the after-life, compassion makes no sense and is in fact impossible for the rich man. The mercy of God always decreases when mercy for one's neighbor decreases. When mercy for one's neighbor is lacking, there is no room for God's mercy.

The parable nevertheless shows us a way how not to fall into the situation of the rich man – by paying attention now to Moses and the Prophets, the Word of God. When Jesus speaks about the end of human life, he focuses on eternity in the context of time – he brings the future through the present. This provides the greatest learning for all of us on what we

should do with our allotted time in this life. It is not wealth or poverty that guarantees or excludes a positive or negative outcome in the Last Judgement, but the ability or inability to see and feel compassion for the other.

Mercy always travels in three dimensions (God, I and the other) and never just in one dimension (I myself) or in two dimensions (God and I). The Word of God helps us to convert the human heart to compassion. Mercy flows from the human heart and only the Word of God is capable of supplying it and preventing it from drying up. When the Word of God penetrates the human heart, it is capable of rekindling it and healing it of every kind of blindness and deafness. It makes people capable of seeing what they would not have seen before. May this be our prayer while we open our hearts to the Word of God.



### **Saint's quote:**

#### **Blessed Vladimir Ghika:**

When the day ends, the disciples of Jesus can be recognized only by the way they, like their master, know how to 'break bread' by sacrificing the living bread of their own bodies for their brothers.



### **Pope's quote:**

I should like to pause with you today on the parable of the rich man and the poor Lazarus. The lives of these two people seem to run on parallel tracks: their life status is opposite and not at all connected. The gate of the rich man's house is always closed to the poor man, who lies outside it, seeking to eat the leftovers from the rich man's table. The rich man is dressed in fine clothes, while Lazarus is covered with sores; the rich man feasts sumptuously every day, while Lazarus starves. Only the dogs take care of him, and they come to lick his wounds. This scene recalls the harsh reprimand of the Son of Man at the Last Judgement: "I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was [...] naked and you did not clothe me" (Mt 25:42-43). Lazarus is a good example of the silent cry of the poor throughout the ages and the contradictions of a world in which immense wealth and resources are in the hands of the few.

Jesus says that one day that rich man died: the poor and the rich die, they have the same destiny, like all of us, there are no exceptions to this. Thus, that man turned to Abraham, imploring him in the name of 'father' (vv. 24, 27). Thereby claiming to be his son, belonging to the People of God. Yet in life he showed no consideration toward God. Instead he made himself the centre of all things, closed inside his world of luxury and wastefulness. In excluding Lazarus, he did not take into consideration the Lord nor his law. To ignore a poor man is to scorn God! We must learn this well: to ignore the poor is to scorn God. There is a detail in the parable that is worth noting: the rich man has no name, but only an adjective: 'the rich man'; while the name of the poor man is repeated five times, and 'Lazarus' means 'God helps'. Lazarus, who is lying at the gate, is a living reminder to the rich man to remember God, but the rich man does not receive that reminder. Hence, he will be condemned not because of his wealth, but for being incapable of feeling compassion for Lazarus and for not coming to his aid.

St Peter's Square, Wednesday, 18 May 2016



### **Act of mercy** - Feed the hunger, Give drink to the thirst

The relationship of the rich man and poor Lazarus continues even after death, where the rich man comes to know how heartless he was to Lazarus. His sin of omission - of not helping Lazarus to come out of his misery, has led him to a life of torment in hell. As we pray on these scripture verses, let us ask pardon for our negligence in showing mercy to the poor and for the grace to reawaken our conscience to consider and love them. In our daily life, as we confront people in situations which need consolation and immediate material necessities, let us try to respond to these basic needs with concrete acts of love and mercy.

Mother Mary, Mother most merciful, pray for us. Hail Mary....

