

Archbishop Lori's Homily: Thursday, 2nd Week of Lent; Lenten Evening of Recollection

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Baltimore Area, Federal Association, Order of Malta

Cathedral of Mary Our Queen

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Introduction

The story of Lazarus repeats itself day after day on the streets of Baltimore. In our city there are many homeless people who suffer from hunger, homelessness, drug and alcohol addiction. Most are unemployed or at best minimally employed and only a few ever really receive medical attention. They are seen sleeping in bus stops, on street corners, and at the entrances to buildings.

And while, in the privacy of our homes, most of us do not dress in royal purple, we are by worldly standards well-off, even if we face economic challenges ourselves. Indeed, an ordinary person living in our country lives better than the picture which Jesus painted of the rich man in the Gospel. As we live our busy and complicated lives, we may find ourselves off-put by the homeless and the poor all around us. We may find ourselves shrugging our shoulders and saying to ourselves that there is little or nothing we can do about all this and that if we give them money they'll just use it for drugs or alcohol. Or we may just become inured and indifferent to the sight of the homeless, regarding them simply as part of the landscape.

So it would seem that the Lord's parable about the rich man and the poor man, Lazarus, at his doorstep strikes uncomfortably close to home. When that happens, let us heed Jeremiah's warning sounded in today's first reading. Our complicated human hearts will seek a way out of our responsibility. We'll say to ourselves that Catholic Charities is taking care of these people and we donate to Catholic Charities (and we should!). Or we'll say that it is the duty of the government to take care of

these people and, after all, we pay taxes, indeed, a lot of taxes (and we do!). All that is true but none of it takes the sting out of Jesus' parable. We are to be neighbor, brother, and sister to the poor.

Failing and Passing the Test

That the rich man failed to pass the test of righteousness is evident in the Gospel. Lazarus winds up in the bosom of Abraham, that is, in paradise whereas the rich man winds up in a place of torment. And from that place of torment, the rich man cries out for the mercy which, while on earth, he failed to show to Lazarus.

Notice, though, even amid the torments of hell, the rich man has not changed his stripes. He still doesn't have much regard for Lazarus; he thinks of him as his servant. He asks Abraham to send Lazarus down to hell with a drop of water to cool his parched tongue. In his exchange with Abraham, the rich man never gets around to admitting that he treated Lazarus with shameful indifference. He only focuses on his own suffering and tries to warn his brothers to repent. One suspects that he wants them to repent not because he now loves the poor but rather so that they will be spared the torment he is now facing.

Pope Francis helps us to see things the way the rich man should have seen them. In 2015 he organized, as you may remember, "The World Day of the Poor" and on that occasion taught us that "the poor are at the heart of the Gospel." He went on to say: "If in the eyes of the world the poor have little value, they are the ones who open for us the way to heaven; they are our passport to paradise. In the poor we find the presence of Jesus, who, though rich, became poor for us." Here, I think, the Pope is really helping us to understand Jesus' parable.

Answering the Call of Jesus

"In the poor," the Pope also said, "Jesus knocks at the door of our hearts thirsting for our love." It takes courage to open that inward door to the poor and needy and perhaps that is one reason why Jesus has put us together in the Church so that we might have the courage to do together what we find so hard to do individually.

Every day, parishioners volunteer at Our Daily Bread and at other charities. There

are many other paths to charity for the poor and the sick – many of you present at this Mass this evening belong to the Order of Malta and I would be remiss not to mention the Knights of Columbus – these and other church organizations are pathways to opening our hearts to the poor.

Before receiving the Eucharist we will ask the Lord to give us “our daily bread”. Let us also ask that we might be his instruments in providing the daily bread of physical sustenance and the daily bread of human respect to the poor who are very much with us in the City of Baltimore and beyond. And may God bless us and keep us always in his love.