

17. March 2022

The existence of the poor invites us to do good

Lk 16:19-31

'There was a rich man who used to dress in purple and fine linen and feast magnificently every day. And at his gate there used to lie a poor man called Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to fill himself with what fell from the rich man's table. Even dogs came and licked his sores. Now it happened that the poor man died and was carried away by the angels into Abraham's embrace. The rich man also died and was buried. In his torment in Hades he looked up and saw Abraham a long way off with Lazarus in his embrace. So he cried out, "Father Abraham, pity me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in agony in these flames." Abraham said, "My son, remember that during your life you had your fill of good things, just as Lazarus his fill of bad. Now he is being comforted here while you are in agony. But that is not all: between us and you a great gulf has been fixed, to prevent those who want to cross from our side to yours or from your side to ours." So he said, "Father, I beg you then to send Lazarus to my father's house, since I have five brothers, to give them warning so that they do not come to this place of torment too." Abraham said, "They have Moses and the prophets, let them listen to them." The rich man replied, "Ah no, father Abraham, but if someone comes to them from the dead, they will repent." Then Abraham said to him, "If they will not listen either to Moses or to the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone should rise from the dead."

Today's gospel serves to meditate on two distinct points.

The first is the seriousness of the duty to share one's goods - whatever they may be - with those in need; and not to keep them for oneself with heartlessness.

The second point we can meditate on is the fact that faith is not awakened by miracles; it is a gift.

Holy Scripture and the inner guidance of the Holy Spirit teach us that we should not disorderly attach ourselves to transient goods, nor build upon them a seemingly secure and quiet life. All earthly goods have only a limited value, are uncertain and pass away, just as everything in this world passes away. By simply applying

Christian prudence, it should already be clear to us that we cannot attach our hearts to anything transient, for we would lose our freedom and build the house of our life on sand (Mt 7:26-27). But it is not only this view that counsels us to keep our right distance from earthly goods.

In today's parable we see that the rich man missed opportunities to do good, that he had no compassion for the poor, that he wasted the opportunity to win friends in heaven with unjust money, as the Lord recommends in another parable (Lk 16:9). The rich man overlooked this reality and perhaps it did not even occur to him to share his wealth, or at least to give some of what he had in abundance to the poor Lazarus at his door.

Precisely the presence of Lazarus should have reminded him that one should not be rich only for oneself. Lazarus should have reminded him of a deeper meaning of life; namely, to turn the gift of riches - in this case material riches - into a blessing for other people. It was precisely this Lazarus, lying at his door, who could have interceded for him before God at the moment of giving an account of his life, if only the rich man had looked at him and allowed himself to be touched in his heart.

What an opportunity to do good comes to us through those who are in need of our help! Their existence helps us not to fall into hardness of heart; and, by sharing, we remove ourselves from the illusory and seductive attraction of wealth.

For the rich man in the parable, it was too late! After his death, he could no longer make amends for what he had wasted, and this is a strong exhortation to us not to waste the time we are given to do good! Indeed, when we do good, our joy increases, because *"There is more happiness in giving than in receiving"* (Acts 20:35b).

Let us now return to the second point we mentioned at the beginning. The rich man in the parable believed that a miracle could save his brothers from a fate similar to his own. He was convinced that, if the dead Lazarus visited his brothers to warn them, they would listen to him.

But Abraham denies such a request. Faith is not subject to miracles; rather it is a gift and an offering from God, to which we are invited to respond. Faith is a supernatural reality, but it also involves our human nature, so that the understanding assents to faith, the will turns to God and the heart turns more and more to Him. Miracles may help to strengthen faith and be a sign to unbelievers, but there is no guarantee that those who see them will believe.

If we obey Sacred Scripture and the authentic Magisterium of the Church, and if we listen attentively to the voice of the Holy Spirit who speaks to us within us and in many other ways, that is enough. Everything else is added! What is essential to be able to walk firmly on the way of following the Lord has already been given to us. Thus, we learn to listen to His voice wherever it manifests itself to us. Then we will be listening to Moses and the prophets, and realising that they all prepared the coming of the Lord.

And, as the psalm says, “*by your light we see the light.*” (Ps 36:9)