

SERMON 11-5-18

In Today's Gospel reading, our Lord tells a parable that makes a *striking* comparison between the fate of a rich man and the fate of a poor man. The rich man, we are told, was clothed in fine linen and feasted sumptuously every day.

However, the poor man, (named Lazarus), had none of these things. He was starving, sick and covered in sores. He sat outside on the rich man's doorstep waiting...hoping to be able to have some of the leftover bread from the rich man's table.

Now, bear in mind, that this isn't exactly fresh bread either: In those days, they did not use special napkins to clean their hands. Instead, dinner guests used the bread to wipe their fingers clean after a meal and then tossed it out the window for the dogs to eat. So, Lazarus was actually surviving off of other peoples garbage!

It's disturbing to think about how one man can have everything he could ever need or want (with servants catering to his every desire), while on the other hand, there is Lazarus, who had nothing except table scraps to eat and the dogs to lick his sores. BUT all of that changed when these two men died. Death robs a man of his material riches. As the funeral service of our Orthodox Church says, the grave is where "kings and beggars are the same." And so, the rich man's care-free life of luxury would soon come to an end.

WHEN these two men died, they switched places. Lazarus was taken to the bosom of Abraham by the angels to live in a place of peace and comfort, while the rich man was doomed to an eternity of suffering in hell.

WHY WAS THE RICH MAN SENT TO HELL? It is not simply because he was rich that he was condemned, (being wealthy is not a sin in and of itself), rather it was because of what he did with his riches...or, to be more accurate, what he did NOT DO with them. Instead of using his great earthly wealth to help the poor, (like Lazarus), he was indifferent to them. The rich man's sin, therefore, is that he DID NOTHING. It was his inaction, that led to his being sent to hell.

The rich man took beggars for granted. In his mind, this was simply how the world worked--- there are rich and there are poor, -- it's the inevitable landscape of life. So, he simply ignored them, and by doing so, showed that ALL HE REALLY CARED ABOUT WAS HIMSELF. He didn't show love for his neighbor, and therefore, -- while he was materially wealthy, he was also spiritually bankrupt.

The tragic thing is that it was only when the rich man was in the midst of his torment in hell, that he finally began to think about others. He called to mind his five brothers and how he wanted to warn them of the fate that awaited them if they didn't change their ways. But Abraham, responded to him saying, "Your brothers have Moses and the Prophets to warn them; let your brothers listen to what they say.

But the rich man pleaded, saying that it would not be enough... "If someone were to rise from the dead then they would be convinced!" but Abraham responded: "If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets then they will not be convinced even if someone were to rise from the dead."

The irony is that God did send someone to rise from the dead: His only begotten Son. And he taught us and has warned us about our fate if we follow the path of the rich man in today's Gospel. That's why we have this parable. To wake us up! To get us to realize the suffering around us and the fact that there are Lazarus' throughout the world and even at our own doorstep that need our help. As our Lord says in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark: "The poor you will ALWAYS have with you."

Now, we may not be as selfish with our money as the rich man, but if we stop and count up all of our possessions --- big screen tv's, cars, food on our tables and a roof over our heads...then by comparison to beggars...we are very rich! And certainly, we can spare some of these luxuries and help our fellow man in need.

As St. Simeon the New Theologian Says:

"When a man really considers his neighbor as himself, he will never tolerate having more than his neighbor. If he does have more, but refuses to share things generously until he himself becomes as poor as his neighbor, then he will find that he has not fulfilled the commandment of the master. He no longer wants to give to all who ask, and

instead turns away from someone who asks of him while she still has a penny or a crust of bread. He has not treated his neighbor as he would like to be treated by him. In fact, even if a man had given food and drink and clothes to all the poor, even the least, and had done everything else for them, he has only to despise or neglect a single one and it will be reckoned as if he had passed by Christ and God and He was hungry and thirsty.”

Even if we do not have great wealth, we can still give something...even if it doesn't seem like much.

As St. Basil the great says:

“The bread in your cupboard belongs to the hungry man; the coat hanging in your closet belongs to the man who needs it; the shoes rotting in your closet belong to the man who has no shoes; the money you put into the bank belongs to the poor.”

The opportunities to help the poor are abundant!

We can do more right here in our own church: we can take part in the Christmas Food Box program to help those in need, and come time for Great Lent, we can make an effort to put more in our food for Hungry People boxes.

These are just a few ways that we can avoid acting like the rich man. But ultimately, it is a change in our mindset, that is key in this whole process. We have to stop glorifying wealth the way the secular world does.

This is not easy. After all, money makes us feel secure. We want to keep it for ourselves...It's so easy for us to allow it to become the focus of our lives: our budgets, our bills, our retirements, etc...everything can become ABOUT MONEY. But we must be careful not to become attached to it... as St. Paul says in his 2nd Letter to Timothy: “those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many seamless and hurtful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is the root of all evils; it is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced their hearts with many pangs.”

Money can also deceive us into judging the worth of a person. We live in a society where the rich are praised...they tell us: "the more you have the more you're worth." Money gives us a sense of power, a sense of control...but we can't allow it to consume us. Or we will end up like the rich man. As the Lord said: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of the needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven."

Indeed, it should not be surprising, that this parable is the only *one* where Christ speaks of a person going to hell: the rich man. And it is because he loved his wealth more than his neighbor. He did not care for others, which is the criteria by which we will ALL be judged. Recall how in the Gospel of Matthew chapter 25 our Lord says: we will be judged by whether or not we fed the hungry and clothed the naked.

BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST, CHRISTIANITY IS ULTIMATELY ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS. IT IS ABOUT LOVING ONE ANOTHER AS GOD HAS LOVED US. Therefore, WE CANNOT TURN A BLIND EYE TO THOSE WHO ARE IN NEED. AS FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST, WE MUST HELP OUR NEIGHBOR, treating them as ourselves. The poor, the needy, the sick *are our INVITATION and our OPPORTUNITY* to follow God's commands and gain heaven. So, Let us heed this morning's Gospel and DETACH ourselves from money and instead, attach ourselves to our concern for each other and avoid the same fate of the rich man.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, one God, AMEN.