

Twenty Sixth Sunday of Ordinary Time-C

Lk 16:19-31

Dear Friends,

In his Gospel, Luke puts great emphasis on the theme of reversal. Right at the beginning we have in Mary's great hymn, the Magnificat: **"He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones but lifted up the lowly. The hungry he has filled with good things, the rich he has sent away empty. (Lk: 1: 52-53)"** In the Sermon on the Plain this theme of reversal dominates. One clear contrast is, **"Blessed are you who are poor, for the kingdom of God is yours." (Lk 6:12)**. Then in Lk 6:20 we read: **"But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation."** Then in Lk 13:30 we read: **"For behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last"**.

Jesus' entry into the human scene has had many consequences. The great reversal is one of them that awaits us. Today's parable about Lazarus and the unidentified rich man is a significant example of this turn-around. The two characters experience a deep transformation of their fortunes. There is a profound message in this story for us.

The first lesson for us is that all wealth, status, prestige, privilege and power is transitory. Secondly, we need to learn that ownership is not absolute. It has consequences. When we do not accept these realities, we are subject to the great reversal. These great changes flow from the radically Good News that Jesus offers us.

The story does not describe either character as particularly good or bad. The problem is neglect and blindness. Luke, in this parable, found only in his Gospel, goes deeply into the details the reversal. First, in contrast to almost all of history, the poor man is identified and the rich man is nameless. Then, the disparity in physical comfort is dramatically changed. Now the powerful rich man sees Lazarus as the one who can give him what he wants. First, it is water and secondly, it is help for his brothers.

In his lifetime the rich man was driven in an endless search for comfort. His wealth was a source of prestige and power. His possessions were a vehicle of security and control. Death destroyed these deceptions and revealed the truth. There is a social mortgage on God's blessings. They need to be an instrument of justice. In the story of Lazarus, Jesus is teaching us to open our eyes to the poor around us. Our heart needs to move us to respond to the needy at our doorstep whether that doorstep is in our family or neighborhood or the many borders we create to protect our comfort personally, communally or nationally.

Pope Francis said that a lifestyle that is too comfortable leads to the gentrification of the heart. The results of a lifestyle driven by ever-expanding consumption diminishes the spirit. It

does damage to the eyes of the heart. It is setting up our slippery slope into the great reversal that confronts us in the story of Lazarus.

Like the brothers of the rich man, the Word of God offers us a clear call to conversion. We also have the added advantage of experiencing the risen Christ. The question we have to ask ourselves is whether we can see the poor in our midst? Does the message of the Risen Christ allow us to see in our possessions an instrument of love and service for those who are in need in our world?

Today's parable has a simple and clear implication for us. We need to cast off our comfortable blindness and begin to see with a new heart rooted in the call of Jesus to walk in the light.