

PASTORAL REFLECTION FOR SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 25

The Twenty-sixth Sunday of Ordinary Time

Today, we have the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. We can read this parable too quickly. We know it well, and we remember how it ends. As much as we would like to spiritualize this story, it is very difficult to explain away its central meaning, especially in the light of everything Luke says about money and possessions elsewhere in the Gospel.

You note that the rich man has no name. He is simply anonymous. By contrast, Lazarus is the only one who has a name in any of the parables of Jesus. Could this be saying to us that the poor are never invisible to God? And the rich man does nothing wrong. He is a believer. He does not abuse or mistreat Lazarus. What he does to deserve his fate is NOTHING. He ignores him and his needs. And then from the afterlife, true to his character, even though he now sees their contrasting outcomes, the rich man regards the poor as servant, seeking to send Lazarus on errands for his own selfish cause. "Bring me cool water." "Go and warn my brothers."

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus might be difficult for North Americans whose lifestyle stands in deep contrast with the majority of the rest of the world who have so much less. Like so much else that Luke says about money and possessions, it stands as a stinging indictment not only of the great confidence we place on financial security and the comfort of luxury but also of the drastic inequities between rich and poor we allow to perpetuate. I cannot help but recall the 47 people who were indicted in Minnesota last week for fraudulently acquiring a quarter of a billion dollars of COVID relief money destined for feeding hungry children missing school lunch programs. Recent estimates indicate up to eight billion dollars of relief money headed for the needy enriched the lives of scammers. And what of a church that would cut off free breakfast and lunch programs for students, some of which for whom these programs provide their only meals?

The message is clearly spoken in this parable. We thank God that we belong to a church community that is accustomed to responding to the poor, and that with our outreach efforts we call one another to continue making that generous response.

Sister Chabanel Mathison, O.S.U.