

26th Sunday in Ordinary Time – C

I think most Catholics have heard of this thing called canon law but only have a vague idea of what it is. Basically it is like the civil law that governs the Catholic Church; it is distinct from, but one could say informed by, God's Law as in the Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount, and so on. Canon law was of course not presented by Jesus to his 12 apostles – actually neither was the Bible – but rather it was developed by the Church over time in response to different situations that arose in the Church. And as such, a lot of canon law – in fact, most of it – has to do with money. Because money can be and has been a corrupting factor in the life of the Church, as it has been in every human society.

And things like riches and wealth come up again and again in the Scriptures. Jesus would often refer to it in his teachings. And for

good reason. There is nothing inherently wrong with riches and wealth and money, but, like power, it can be coveted and easily abused, and so can be spiritually dangerous for us.

And so today in our Gospel reading, Jesus tells the Pharisees a parable often called the Parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man. This Gospel is part of a series of Gospel readings in which Jesus is engaged in dialogue with the Pharisees: last week, for example, we heard the Parable of the Dishonest Steward. And Jesus tells the Pharisees the parable we heard today because, as it says a few verses earlier in Luke's Gospel, "The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all these things and sneered at him." So, Jesus has to set them straight about what should be the proper attitude towards money.

We live in a time and place in which there is an abundance of money and wealth and comfort. But if you happen to be at a point in your life in which you are struggling to make ends meet, it might not seem like it, and this might be a kind of annoying thing to hear,

but relative to most of human history, we do lead more materially comfortable lives in general – much more so than for most of our ancestors. And I would venture to say that the older generations among us remember how much more modestly everyone used to live. When my own parents were children, most people still did not own cars and many people didn't even have indoor plumbing. As crazy as the world is today, I have to admit, I'm grateful that I live in a time and place when there is such a thing as indoor plumbing.

So hearing a parable such as the one we heard in today's Gospel sounds perhaps very foreign to us. We don't live in a place where there are poor, hungry people literally laying outside our front door, like Lazarus of the parable. Of course, there are still plenty of places around the world where this kind of poverty is still very visible, and it is shocking to see. But it is amazing how quickly we human beings can adjust to things, and even poor people laying in the streets can sadly and easily become part of the background of

everyday life, as it was in the time of Christ (and for much of human history). But Jesus said elsewhere in the Gospels, “The poor you will always have with you.” Even in our own country, the poor are in our midst, but they are much less visible. There are different kinds of poverty, and material poverty is just one of those kinds. Although there are still people who suffer from material poverty even in our country, there are other kinds of poverty that are even more prevalent from which people suffer which are more hidden. I would say that the most prominent form of poverty in our society now is spiritual poverty. Henry David Thoreau said in the 19th century that “the mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation.” I would translate that into today’s language that many, many people lead lives without hope. They might appear to be happy on the outside, but inside so many people are numb and feel hopeless.

I remember a few years ago, when I was at another parish, I was invited over for dinner at the home of a parishioner. There was

in the family a boy of about 12 or 13 and I asked him if he had thought about what he wanted to do when he grew up. He told me that he wanted to be an “influencer”. At the time, I had never heard this term, so he had to explain it to me. Basically, you make videos about your life that people watch. Now, I am all too familiar with influencers and their videos. And the lives that they present to the world usually look exciting and enviable. Never boring, never dull, never mundane. But despite the exciting façade, there is an emptiness behind them. After a while, I can’t help but think: what is the point?

I think the hopelessness that many people feel often comes down to a lack of meaning in life. I recently heard a quote from the actor Jim Carrey – I’m going to paraphrase it – but essentially he said something like, “I think everybody should get rich and famous and have everything they ever dreamed of so they could see that’s not the answer.” Translation: money doesn’t equal happiness. Nor

does it give meaning to life. We can have lots of money and yet still be spiritually poor.

What Jesus of course is calling us to in this parable is a conversion of hearts, specifically, in a couple ways: first, an awareness of the poor in our midst. And as I said, they *are* in our midst. They are not as visible as in some times and places in our world, but they are still there. The poverty can be more difficult to see because it can be more hidden – as I said, it can be hidden behind the façade of what might appear to be a perfect life – but it is still there. There is also in our country a great poverty of loneliness, which is usually hidden behind closed doors. So again, first we must open our eyes – and our hearts – to the poverty that is in our midst. It is here in our own community, in our parish, perhaps even in our own families.

And then we must take action: we must strive to alleviate the suffering of others, to ease the suffering that comes with the poverty

they experience. I don't think our response has to be complicated; it's easy to get overwhelmed by all the needs out there and to wonder how best to respond. Much of our politics involve two sides who just keep shouting at and assuming the worse of each other; how about just doing something for a change? That's not to say that every response is a good one; we also have to ask God to give us wisdom and prudence to know how to respond to the needs of others. It can be easy to let emotions and feelings get in the way as well, but what might feel good to us might not be what is best for the other. Loving the other cannot be separated from Truth; otherwise, it is not real love and won't really help others.

And, as Jesus relates in this parable, there are consequences to not taking action. There are consequences to ignoring the poor who are in our midst, caught up in our own lives, perhaps in the pursuit of our own comforts and desires. The rich man of the parable ended

up in a place of suffering after he died, while the poor man Lazarus went to heaven.

It is not wrong to have wealth or to be wealthy, but, as with everything else, what matters is what we do with what we have. We need always to pray: to pray to be able to discern the needs of others, and to pray for how best to serve them. And then to take action, using our own resources – what we have been given – to help them.

We cannot solve all the world's problems. We cannot create a perfect world. We are never going to be able to make heaven on earth. When we try to do this, disaster inevitably follows.

Thankfully, God does not ask the impossible of us: He doesn't ask us or expect us to create a perfect world. He just asks us to do our part, and to do something, however small, each day. When we do this, we get out of ourselves, and we become capable of loving more than we could have imagined. Let's ask God to show us who are the poor in our midst – in other words, who are those in our lives, in our

community, in our world – who are in need, whom God is calling us to serve.

- **September 28, 2025 at St. Mary's, Spring Lake**