

Homily for the 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C

September 25, 2022

St. Bavo Parish

Rev. Peter J. Pacini, C.S.C.

First Reading: Amos 6:1a, 4-7 (Woe to the complacent in Zion!)

Responsory: Psalm 146 (Praise the Lord, my soul!)

Second Reading: 1 Timothy 6:11-16 (Pursue righteousness, devotion, faith, love, patience and gentleness.)

Gospel: Luke 16:19-31 (Parable of the rich man and Lazarus.)

This is the second week in a row that a prophecy from Amos has put a spotlight directly on the main point that Jesus was trying to make in one of his parables. This week Amos is incensed by people living in such luxury that they have grown self-indulgent and complacent, even in the face of grave dangers to their society. It's interesting to note, however, that Amos does not accuse these rich folks of any particular sin. Although he's disgusted by their lavish and carefree lifestyle, he never claims that they have mistreated anyone. His only complaint is that the Kingdom of Israel is in danger of collapse, and these people are just having way too much fun to notice or to care.

The rich man in Jesus' parable is very similar to the *real* people that Amos criticizes. He does no harm to anyone. He simply enjoys life to the full and, crucially, pays *no attention whatsoever* to the needy around him. His lack of empathy toward all those less fortunate than himself is encapsulated in his treatment of the poor beggar, Lazarus, who sits outside his door day after day. The rich man does nothing to Lazarus to make his suffering worse, but he also does nothing *for* Lazarus to ease his suffering. He has such abundant resources, while Lazarus has nothing, yet he chooses to look the other way instead of helping. For this sin of *omission*, the rich man faces torment in the afterlife.

The extraordinary self-centeredness of the rich man continues into the afterlife. When he sees Lazarus, no longer suffering at his door, but resting comfortably at the bosom of Abraham, he thinks that Lazarus should do his bidding. He has the gall to ask Father Abraham to send Lazarus as his errand boy, to cool his tongue with water or to go and warn his brothers. The rich man ignored Lazarus when he had the opportunity to help, but now he wants Lazarus to go out of his way to be of service to him!

It's ironic that the rich man finds a huge chasm placed between him and Lazarus in the afterlife, preventing Lazarus from coming to his aid. No such chasm existed between them when *Lazarus* was the one in need. Lazarus literally was right outside his door. It would have taken no effort at all for the rich man to dispatch one of his servants to dress Lazarus' festering wounds or to bring him some of the food from the table where the rich man was dining sumptuously every night. He chose not to do even the simplest things to care for this poor soul while he had the chance. Now that the tables are turned, his needs cannot be met nearly as easily.

It's also quite ironic that the rich man begs Father Abraham to send Lazarus back from the dead to warn his brothers, so that they will not end up in that same place of torment. But,

Abraham points out that such extraordinary measures shouldn't be necessary. All his brothers have to do is pay attention to the Scriptures, which so clearly convey the same message that Lazarus would give them. No one needs to come back from the dead to teach them compassion for the poor and suffering. The Word of God already teaches that lesson plainly. They just need to listen, and care about someone other than themselves.

This parable should make all of us here at St. Bavo's a little bit uneasy. We're not a particularly rich parish, but we're not poor, either. We don't need to look too far to see people better off than us, but we also don't need to look far to see people who lack many of the basic necessities that we take for granted. And, if we consider how people in less developed parts of the world have to struggle to survive, it may seem that, by comparison, we're "dressed in purple garments and fine linen and dining sumptuously each day." That's not a criticism or an accusation; it's simply a *fact*. Remember, the rich man in the parable was not condemned for being rich. He was condemned for being *indifferent* to a fellow human being in dire need.

Indifference to the plight of others is a danger for all of us who live relatively comfortable and secure lives. We can easily forget how many people live with fear and insecurity every single day. In this neighborhood, we're not going to see them camped outside our door, begging for scraps from our table. Living this far from the Southern border, we're not going to see the thousands of people desperately seeking asylum in our country every day. We may never encounter a refugee from a war-torn country who has been resettled in our area. These people certainly exist. Their needs are very real, and their circumstances are utterly heartbreaking, but they are mostly invisible to us. We often think of them in the abstract, as *statistics* rather than individuals, each with a unique and very human story to tell. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus reminds us to open our eyes and our hearts to see the suffering of others, even if we never have an opportunity to meet them face-to-face.

The Catholic Church offers us various opportunities to practice this sort of compassion, by supporting its many charitable works. Many people don't have the time or the energy to volunteer at a place like the Center for the Homeless, or the Christ Child Society, or Hannah's House, or any number of other ministries. Charitable *giving* offers an even easier way to participate. Many of our special collections throughout the year help to finance these types of services to the needy. Much of the money from the Bishop's Appeal also is earmarked for works of charity. We should all be proud that the Church, from its inception, has always placed the care of the poor and the vulnerable at the core of its mission. And, we should be pleased to contribute to these causes as we are able.

The most important thing for us to do, however, is simply to pay attention to what is happening in our world, our country, our state, and our community, and to watch the news *through a lens of compassion*. The most vulnerable people in society are often vilified and dehumanized, especially in an election year, when people running for office shamelessly *use* them to stir up the anger and fear of their political base. The poor and marginalized are treated like a problem to be solved, or a threat to be eliminated, not as people to be loved. We Christians must recognize and honor the human dignity of *every person*, especially those most in need.