

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

A central theme emanating from today's readings includes a disposition of complacency and indifference. In the first reading from Amos, the Lord laments those who are complacent, those who live simply in leisure and luxury. The Lord calls this "wanton revelry." Being so self-absorbed precludes the people of Zion from seeing the suffering right in front of them. These words of the prophet Amos harken to the message Jesus offers to the Pharisees in Luke's Gospel which we hear proclaimed today.

The words of Amos and Jesus Christ rouse us from the easy ways into which we can so easily fall into, a routine that can sometimes prevent us from seeing suffering and struggles of others, even those in such close proximity to ourselves. St. Paul, in his letter to Timothy, offers us excellent spiritual tools and exercises to help us configure ourselves to a more compassionate, aware, and empathetic stance towards our brothers and sisters. "But you, man of God, pursue righteousness, devotion, faith, love, patience, and gentleness." When we live these qualities, we express the truth that it is "God who gives life to all things." The life-giving gifts of grace and the Holy Spirit help us to place our priorities in their proper perspective, which ultimately seeks to go the good, to pursue justice and dignity for all persons, irrespective of their station in life or place in society. Faith, love, patience and gentleness are all the characteristics we see in Jesus Christ and we pray for the courage to cultivate and emulate those qualities in ourselves.

Today's Gospel reading from Luke accentuates the dichotomy between worldly wealth and poverty. It speaks very clearly to our call to support one another, brothers and sisters, most especially those who experience profound hardship and difficulty in life. In the portrayal of the radical differences in the living conditions of both the rich man and Lazarus, the issue is not so much about the rich man's wealth per se but rather his selfishness, self-centeredness and total lack of regard for those around him. Jesus uses the searing image - quite purposefully - of placing Lazarus right at the rich man's doorstep. This proximity of the rich man and Lazarus - the closeness it connotes - makes Jesus' point even more demanding. Lazarus doesn't live down the road or in the village square. He literally is the man's neighbor. Yet, the rich man doesn't even see him. Lazarus is the invisible man! The image of his poor estate - to the point where even dogs licked his sores - cannot but arouse a deep sense of pity and compassion. Yet, in his very poverty, Lazarus experiences the richness of God's love and mercy.

When Lazarus dies, he is carried to the bosom of Abraham, himself a man of suffering and faithfulness. The abject poverty Lazarus experienced in this earthly life rendered him rich in the safety and care of God's heavenly kingdom. In stark contrast, when the rich man died, he experienced torment. He pleaded with Abraham to have Lazarus give him even a tiny dip of water. Yet, the chasm which now exists for him was the same chasm that separated him from Lazarus in this life. Part of our Christian call is to lessen the chasm - to close the gap - which prevents us from treating others with respect, especially the poor, marginalized, and dispossessed. The rich man asks Abraham to reach out to his brothers in order that they might not suffer the same fate as him.

In reality, the truth of justice and charity is right in front of us. We find it in the Scriptures, in the prophetic voices who herald reconciliation and conversion of heart, in the service of the poor and most vulnerable around us. We often seek answers to the complex and complicated aspects of life in the distance. Often, expressing and living out our Christian call to love our neighbors as ourselves is quite simple. We don't have very far to look. This call—this living—is at our doorstep!

Fr. Tom