

Sept 29, 2013 26th Sunday, C Cycle

Homily for the 50th anniversary of graduation from St. Mary's Academy, in Hudson, NY

♪The Lord hears the cry of the poor, blessed be the Lord ♪

That is the theme of the readings we just heard. The prophets of Israel, like Amos in the 1st reading, the preaching of St. Paul in the 2nd and the story Jesus tells in the Gospel all repeat the message of that song, and call us to respond to the cry of the poor. From the first century to the 21st, the Church has always taught that we must care for each other, and have a special concern for the ones who are the most neglected and vulnerable.

That's what today's Gospel parable is all about and it is part of why we are gathered to celebrate this weekend. But what does that story have to do with us, here and now as we celebrate our 50th anniversary of graduating from HS here in Hudson - at the scene of the crime for most of us?

We are invited to see *ourselves* in all three main characters in the parable: Lazarus, the rich person and Abraham. [which one do you see yourself in?]. I am Lazarus when I realize that I stand in need of God's grace for my very life, not to mention my salvation. I am the rich person, when I forget that my riches are gifts and neglect to share them with the people at my door, I am Abraham when I welcome someone in need and share my gifts.

When I thought of the ways I feel like Lazarus today, I thought of two things in my life. First, while I am not hungry and covered with sores, I am feeling my age. When I am fishing I cannot stay very long on the trout stream without running out of energy and the ability to balance on the rocks, so I don't always come home with supper. And sometimes I feel the pain in my legs the next day. [just this past week I slipped on some rocks and strained my calf. I had to borrow a walker from a 90 year old member of a prayer group we lead in Middleburgh].

Second, Sr. Anna and I continue to do the ministry of leading parish missions and retreats, but we are facing the consequences of getting older and cannot do as much as we used to while taking longer to recover from giving a retreat or a mission. Sometimes we need to "forgive what is," in the words of Richard Rohr.

We continue to get by with a little help from our friends, as the Beatles' song puts it. And we give thanks for the gifts we have been given. Like Abraham, we rejoice to be able to share those gifts with the people God sends to us, but sometimes we regret missed opportunities to share what we have been given.

And who were those characters in the Gospel in the time of Jesus? Who are the ones who represent parts of each of us?

Lazarus is the only character in a parable in all the Gospels who is given a name. His name means, "The one whom God helps."

At first glance, God doesn't seem to help him much until after he dies. But, while he is alive, he is carried to the gate of the rich man's house every day. Who do you think carried him? His friends, who were probably as poor as he was. Maybe they were beggars who were in the same situation.

Who else helped him? The dogs who licked his wounds. Dog saliva has been proven to have healing properties, and in the ancient world, there were even dogs trained to lick people who had sores or wounds. I have heard stories of that kind of therapy even in the 20th century.

The dogs at the rich man's door may have been guard dogs meant to scare people away. Lazarus may have been like St. Francis, someone who was in such harmony with creation that the animals did what they could to care for him. The angels who carried him to the bosom of Abraham were the final messengers of God's help, but Lazarus had been kept alive by his friends and given healing even through the kindness of the dogs.

The rich man, on the other hand, did not act as God's messenger. He did not listen to the command of the Law and the prophets & the psalms. He was so possessed by his possessions that he **ignored** the poor man at his doorstep. His self indulgence is extreme. He wore purple, the most expensive clothes you could get in those times (like Armani suits). He had a huge banquet every day, so his staff never got a day off, not even the Sabbath, so he was going against the Jewish law in more ways than one. Even after he dies, he never shows remorse for ignoring Lazarus, he arrogantly demands that Abraham send the poor man to give him comfort. What an ego!

What is the story teaching the people Jesus speaks to in his time? What does it say to us?

- Only those who know their need, like Lazarus, can really hear the good news of God's love. The rich man was not aware of his need to be in relationship with Lazarus.
- We can hurt each other, and offend God not only by what we do, but by what we fail to do. The sin that sends the rich man into the fire is that he ignored the poor man at his door. Jesus is calling his hearers, and us to notice those who are in need.
- All the resources we have are gifts from God, not our exclusive possessions. We are given them to use for the good of others, especially those in most need of basic necessities. Abraham, even though he was wealthy, was a person known for his hospitality. He shared what he had, especially with those in need.
- God cares for people like Lazarus through others. God has given us to each other to do the work of love and care. We are called simply to see Christ in others, and to be Christ for others.

The honesty to admit my own need and to use God's gifts for good comes from our Baptism, which places us in a web of relationships with Christ at the center.

It is that web of relationships that we celebrate at this Eucharist.

And when we gather for Eucharist we are all one family - because, as this song puts it,

♪ *In Christ there is no east or west, in him no south or north,
but one great family bound by love throughout the whole wide earth.* ♪

Readings at the Mass

Amos 6:1-7 *Woe to the complacent in Zion*

Psalm 146 *The Lord secures justice for the oppressed and gives food to the hungry*

1 Timothy 6:11-16 *Pursue love, patience and gentleness*

Luke 16:19-31 *The story of Lazarus and the rich man*