

TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, OCTOBER 15/28, 2007

GAL. 6:11-18

ST. LUKE 16:19-31

by

Fr. Dr. Photios+ (W)

Gospel....There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day:

And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores.

And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.

And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried;

And in Hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham from afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.

And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.

But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.

And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence.

Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house:

For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment.

Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.

And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went into them from the dead, they will repent.

And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

Lazarus, a poor beggar, riddled with open sores, laid at the rich man's gate, only hoping for the crumbs from the opulent man's table. The rich man answered not. Both then died. But notice where each went. The rich man to Hades, Lazarus to Abraham. The tormented rich man could see Abraham in the distance and Lazarus in his bosom.

This parable teaches us to be wise stewards of wealth. Wealth, itself, is not the problem; it is how we misuse it. The rich man "was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day," showed no mercy to Lazarus, gave him no alms. Lazarus, destitute, grievously diseased, suffered even more because he "had the added torment of seeing others feasting to excess while he himself starved".¹ He would have been satisfied with just the crumbs, the same crumbs eaten by the dogs. The dogs showed more mercy to the beggar than the rich man, for at least they licked his ulcers and wounds without hurting or biting him as if they were pitying him.² But the rich man totally ignored his plight and continued his extravagant living style. He displayed no mercy.

Bl. Theophylact reminds us that this story did not actually occur. There was an extremely poor, sickly man named Lazarus, who lived in Jerusalem at the time.³ However, according to the Fathers of the Church:

The Lord, then, fashioned this story to teach those who show no mercy and give no alms what punishments await them, and to teach those who are suffering what good things they will enjoy on account of the sufferings they patiently endure in this life.⁴

Why doesn't the Lord give the rich man a name? Easy: "such a man is not worthy to be remembered by God by name".⁵ According to St. Gregory the Great, Pope of Rome:

We must observe also, that among the heathen the names of poor men are more likely to be known than of rich. Now our Lord mentions the name of the poor, but not the name of the rich, because God knows and approves the humble, but not the proud.⁶

Lazarus patiently suffered his lot. He didn't blame God (or the rich man) for his plight. This is a lesson for all of us. We are to suffer, patiently, silently, not blaming the Lord or others for our misfortunes.

Both Lazarus and the rich man died, but the rich man went down to Hades because of his vainglory, pride, avarice and total lack of charity and mercy. Because of his lack of mercy, his soul has been buried alive whilst he lived.⁷

When in Hades, the tormented rich man was placed opposite Lazarus so he might observe Lazarus in "such a blessed state" and then realise that his cruelty cost him good things. He saw Lazarus in the bosom of Abraham because the righteous Abraham was hospitable to strangers.⁸ Abraham's bosom is where good things are stored for the righteous, who have navigated the storm to the heavenly haven.⁹

Abraham compassionately addresses him as “Son,” but that’s all Abraham can do. He cannot change their relative positions. It “is impossible to go from the place of punishment to the place of the righteous”.¹⁰ The rich man needed Lazarus ‘too late’. Repentance is impossible in Hell. After all, who would confess you there?¹¹ “... it is impossible, once any man has been condemned, for him to receive even the slightest relief or respite”.¹²

Through punishment the rich man came to his senses and begs Abraham to send Lazarus to the house of his father to save his five brothers. Abraham refers them to the writings and teachings of all the prophets. These are the teachers sent by God. The rich man rejected this referral because he did not believe when he heard the Scriptures, considering them “mere fables”. So, judging that his brothers would not heed them either, he wants Lazarus to rise from the dead-then the brothers will repent.

Abraham’s response is simple. If they will not heed the Scriptures, they will not believe anyone who might come from Hell:

This was demonstrated by the Jews; they did not heed the Scriptures, nor did they believe when they saw the dead arise; instead, they sought to kill Lazarus [the other one - John 12: 9-11]. And after Christ’s Crucifixion, when many men rose from the dead, (the Jews) still continued to attack the apostles with murderous intent. If (such a resurrection from the dead) were profitable for our faith, God would perform it frequently; but now nothing so profits us as careful searching and study of the Scriptures.

... the Scriptures are a lamp and a light; and where they shine, the thief is exposed and caught.”¹³

We are created in God’s image, but our tendency to sin hampers our sojourn to Deification. The rich man in us is the problem. The rich man’s gluttony, avarice and total lack of compassion and mercy whilst he was on earth cost him dearly as the parable shows. On the other hand, Lazarus suffered valiantly, never complaining or blaming his lot on the rich man, others, or the Lord, as many people have done and do. Upon death, he was escorted by angels because “he bravely and wisely endured all”.¹⁴

Let this parable be a lesson to us all. Please, Lord, soften our hearts...

+ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

¹ Bl. Theophylact’s *Explanation of the Holy Gospel According to Luke, Vol. III* in the series, Bl. Theophylact’s *Explanation of The New Testament* (tr. from the original Greek by Fr. Christopher Stade, Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 1997, p.213.

² Hieromonk German Ciuba (tr. from the Slavonic into English; translated from the Greek into Slavonic in the year 6851, in the 11th Indiction), *The Gospel Commentary*, Russian Orthodox Church of the Nativity of Christ (Old Rite), Erie, PA, 2002, p. 472.

³ Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, p.213.

⁴ *id.*, p.212.

⁵ *id.*

⁶ St. Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church, Dallas, TX, Orthodox Theology Questions and Answers, *Explanation of Scripture read by Christians on the 22nd Sunday After Pentecost- The parable of the Richman and Lazarus*, Answer 1 to Question 1, cited at p.2, at http://www.orthodox.net/questions/luke_16_19-31_parable_rich_man_lazarus_22sunape .

⁷ Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, p. 213.

⁸ *id.*, p.214.

⁹ *id.* p. 215.

¹⁰ *id.*

¹¹ Ciuba (tr.), *The Gospel Commentary*, *op. cit.*, p. 476.

¹² *id.*, p. 477.

¹³ *id.*, p. 481.

¹⁴ Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, p. 213.