

## The First Sunday after Trinity, A✘D 2008

**Luke 16:19-31** "There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. <sup>20</sup> And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, <sup>21</sup> who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. <sup>22</sup> The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, <sup>23</sup> and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. <sup>24</sup> And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.' <sup>25</sup> But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. <sup>26</sup> And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.' <sup>27</sup> And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house- <sup>28</sup> for I have five brothers- so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.' <sup>29</sup> But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' <sup>30</sup> And he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' <sup>31</sup> He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'"

*In the Name of the Father and of the ✘ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

1 Be careful, Pharisees, the Lord Jesus warned in today's Gospel reading. In the verses immediately preceding today's reading, St. Luke records, "The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him. And he said to them, 'You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.'" (16:14-15).

2 Nothing changes. Sin is not very creative. What is exalted among men is still an abomination in the sight of God. Greed masquerades as stewardship and being thrifty. But behind the mask, it is still greed. The Pharisees are still lovers of money, even if they try to hide their love for money in pious statements about saving for retirement or providing for their families. Hate and envy self-righteously call themselves "justice." But seeking after this justice, even if exalted among men, isn't divine justice. Getting even isn't justice. Neither is bearing a grudge. Wrath cloaks itself as zeal, hoping God might not notice. You're not really angry, you suppose, just zealous for what's right. Lust and adultery parade themselves as fidelity. But you cannot, Pharisee, justify yourself before men, Jesus says, because God knows your heart.

What is exalted among men, what is the way of the world, is and always will be an abomination in God's sight.

3 To call the Pharisees to repentance, Jesus told this story. There was a certain rich man who wore fancy clothing and feasted sumptuously every day inside his luxurious estate. And at the gate outside was a poor man named Lazarus who longed to be fed, not even with a full meal, just with the scraps from the rich man's table. The rich man would not do for the poor man what even the dogs knew needed to be done. They both died. Lazarus was carried by the angels to Abraham's side in heaven. The rich man, whom Jesus doesn't even honor with a name, is buried and goes to hell where he is in torment. Heaven and hell are striking realities in Jesus' story that he tells so the Pharisees might repent and so avoid hell. In heaven, Lazarus has comfort; he has the company of Abraham and the saints. In hell, the rich man has torment, and—contrary to popular notions of hell as a cozy, crowded place—he has no company.

Lazarus has comfort, while the rich man is in anguish.

4 What leads to hell? It's not wealth that puts the rich man there. In terms of wealth, the rich man was impoverished compared to Abraham. But Abraham was in heaven with Lazarus. No, wealth didn't land the rich man in hell, not exactly. Not even his sins of having money as his false god nor his sins of egregiously breaking the fifth commandment by ignoring the needs of Lazarus. The rich man knows what got him there: impenitence. So he pleads with Abraham to send Lazarus to warn his brothers. "If someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent," he reasons. He's right. Repentance is precisely what they need. But even if someone rose from the dead, it would have no effect if they're already resolved not to listen to the Word of God. "If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead."

5 Repent of stubborn impenitence. Repent of trying to veil your sin in pious platitudes. Isaiah warned, "Woe to those who call good evil and evil good" (Is. 5:20). Repent of being unwilling to listen to the Word of God. Impenitence leads to hell.

6        What leads to heaven? Poverty. No, not the poverty of Lazarus. The poverty of the One who told the story, the One who warned the Pharisees, the One promised to Abraham to be his eternal Heir. The One Jesus Christ set aside all His divine wealth to assume the poverty of Lazarus and of the rich man. The Rich Man Jesus Christ assumed the poverty of the world's sin. His poverty, His death on the cross bearing your sinfulness, is what makes you an heir to the wealth of heaven. Knowing the hearts of men, He was unwilling to justify sin or to call evil good. But he took the world's evil upon himself, endured death by crucifixion and separation from God, endured hell in your place.

7        Lazarus who longed for scraps from the rich man's feast received an eternal fare far better than scraps. Lazarus received the feast which has no end in the company of saints and angels. Through the poverty of Jesus Christ, Lazarus was rich.

8        So are you. Even though neither you nor those in the world can see the treasures that belong to you, they are yours, nevertheless. When the Lord claimed you through the waters of Holy Baptism, He placed His triune name upon you, marked you as an heir of eternal life. He gave you the riches of faith in Jesus Christ through these otherwise humble waters. The forgiveness Jesus won on the cross was first delivered to you at the font. And the treasures continue. Having given you godly sorrow over your sin, the Lord proclaims to you His words of forgiveness through the Office of the Ministry. The treasure of forgiveness is lavished upon you in the words of Holy Absolution.

9        And the feast! The feast took place outside the rich man's gates. The feast was Lazarus', not the rich man's, appearances notwithstanding. The feast is outside the gates of what the world exalts. The feast is here, well, a foretaste of it, at least. Here, at this table, the Lord's Altar, you have a foretaste of the eternal feast that will be yours when the Master of the Feast returns to usher you into His banquet hall. Here, He gives you His own Body and Blood as the guarantee of your invitation. With His own Body and Blood, He forgives your sins. Come, the feast is prepared.

10      And the Word of God is still proclaimed. Do not despise it. Moses and the Prophets foretold the death of Jesus on the cross. And the Christian Church continues to proclaim Jesus Christ and Him crucified. This is an inestimable treasure beyond earthly comparison. And, by the Holy Spirit's gift of faith in Jesus, this treasure belongs to you.

*In the Name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

*Soli Deo Gloria*  
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