

## The First Sunday after Trinity, A&D 2009

**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 They're opposites: Lazarus and the rich man. The rich man feasts sumptuously every day, eats the finest meat, the choicest wine, the freshest organic vegetables, has a table spread with more food than he could eat in a week. He is clothed in purple and fine linen, the most expensive garments, tailor-fit and custom-made—no off-the-rack rags for this dapper dude. His palace is, well, palatial, perhaps with expansive marble floors and sky-high columns. He built a wall and a gate to keep out the vermin, the beggars, like Lazarus, so he and his five brothers could enjoy their fancy clothes and fine dining undisturbed by the pleas of the poor and the imprecations of the impoverished. Jesus doesn't even give the man a name, noting him only by his earthly wealth. And you hate him, mostly because you covet his luxury.

2 And Lazarus is quite the opposite. He has no feast of fine foods spread upon his table. He has no table. Instead, he longs for the mere scraps that the rich man would let fall to the floor. Perhaps he sits at the gate so he can sort through the trash and negotiate with the dogs for the rotten scraps. All day long, or so it seems, he begs at the rich man's gate. The only ones willing to show him any mercy are the dogs, who lick his sores, doing the best they know how for this humbled man. And you hate him, too. You wish he'd get away from the gate and

out of your sight. Go get a job and contribute to society, you mutter. Really, you hate him because his impoverishment reminds you how you're just one disease, one foreclosure, one layoff away from being in his position.

3       Opposites in life and also in death. Lazarus died and was carried by angels to Abraham's side. There, in the company of Abraham and the saints, he who knew no earthly comfort has comfort and rest until the day of the Lord's return. The rich man—still nameless and anonymous—also died. He was buried, not carried. In Hades he who lacked no earthly comfort, was in torment. Jesus doesn't tell the parable as some story of karma, with the end result that everyone gets what's coming to him. Don't hear the parable to say that the rich are damned and the poor are saved. Don't forget who's there to welcome Lazarus: Abraham. His riches far surpassed those of the nameless rich man in the parable. And hell doesn't discriminate; it welcomes rich and poor alike.

4       So what's the difference? Why does one end up eternally blessed in the company of the saints and the other eternally tormented, in the loneliness of hell? The rich man knows. He knows what they need, but not how to get it. "If someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent." Repentance. That's what they need. For all the rich man's wealth and possessions, he lacks this: ears to hear the Word of God, Moses and the Prophets. The Word of God calls sinners—Lazarus and the rich man alike—to repentance. This much Lazarus and the rich man have in common: both are sinners, descendants of Adam, damned by the sin with which they were born and which they themselves committed.

5       The difference between Lazarus and the rich man is not in their respective possessions, not even in the way they lived toward one another. The difference is that Lazarus is a beggar, and the rich man is not. He knows he rightfully possesses nothing, deserves nothing. At the end of his life, as he lay dying in his bed, the last seven words Luther wrote were "Wir sind alle Bettler. Hoc est verum." We are all beggars. This is true.

6 You have no rightful claim to eternal blessing. You cannot earn God's favor. Even the slightest sin, a passing lustful or angry thought, a single missed opportunity to serve your neighbor, one selfish thought or act, one moment of trusting in yourself, anything short of perfect obedience to Moses and the prophets, the Ten Commandments, and you're cast outside the gate of the Rich Man's eternal dwelling. We are beggars all; this is true.

7 That's the other Rich Man in the Gospel reading: the One telling the parable. His is the eternal mansion with never-ending feast. His divine wealth far exceeds that of the rich man in the parable or even the patriarch Abraham. Everything in heaven and earth belongs to Him, as He created it all. He is co-equal with God the Father, but He left the Father's House, came outside the gate. The Rich Man set aside His riches and assumed the world's poverty. He took human flesh in the Virgin's womb and took upon Himself all your poverty, all your sinfulness, both inherited and committed. He, the richest, became the poorest. On the cross, the Son of God had nothing except the death you rightfully deserved and the poverty that you were born into. He came to trade places with beggars, to pay the price for all sin, to lavish the riches of His mercy on those outside the gates.

8 If your plot in life is more like Lazarus', rejoice. Learn from your poverty to be a beggar in all matters spiritual. Know that the One who left heaven to bear the poverty of human sinfulness is rich in mercy and forgiveness. These He delights to give to you. If your plot in life is more akin to the rich man, learn from Lazarus to beg for mercy and forgiveness. These cannot be purchased, no matter your wealth. We are beggars all; this is true. Beggars, yes, but the richest beggars in the world, having been given the treasures of faith, forgiveness, and eternal life.

9 And, as the saying goes, beggars can't be choosers. Beggars simply receive what they're freely offered. But the gifts from the Rich Man Jesus are abundant. Here, beggars are brought inside the gates through the waters of Holy Baptism, given an eternal inheritance, a claim to the riches of heaven. What the rich man wouldn't do for Lazarus—treat his sores—the

Rich man Jesus does for you. He soothes your sores with the balm of His Gospel, the word of Holy Absolution that heals your sin. And where the rich man refused to give the beggar even the scraps from his table, the Rich Man who became the outcast beggar gathers you around His table to join in the feast. The food—mere bread and wine to our eyes and tongues—is richer than you can see or taste and finer than on any earthly table in the wealthiest houses. This is the real Body and Blood of the Host Himself. These, the Rich Man Jesus promises, give you what you desperately need: forgiveness of sins. The whole Christian life is one of being a beggar, but to beggars Christ delivers His mercy. We are beggars all; this is true.

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

*Soli Deo Gloria*  
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