

26th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Homily: Fr. Shijo George

Pastor – Sacred Heart Catholic Church, Victoria, BC, Canada

The rich man's cries reached Abraham's ears and must have shaken his heart. Perhaps Abraham thought: "God had given him so many good things; wealth and health. If only he had the inclination to help others, he would also be lying in my lap with Lazarus today." The rich man shouted again: "Father Abraham, please help me! Can you somehow save me from here?" There was only silence, an endless silence.

The rich man said to himself: "There is no escape, I don't think anyone will save me from here." He curled up in that hellfire, crying and moaning for not doing the good he could have done when he was alive. He might also have said: "Oh God, if I could have done at least one good thing in my life, if I could have given that poor Lazarus at least one meal, I probably wouldn't be here." His screams must have shaken even hell. Only a sad silence remained. He called Abraham again: "Father Abraham, would you please at least send Lazarus to dip a little water in my mouth to cool my tongue?"

Finally, Abraham broke his silence and said with a trembling voice: "Child no way. I can't help you in any way. Between you and us is a great chasm is fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us."

If we say, figuratively, the chasm the rich man created between him and Lazarus while living in this world continued to his life after death, how did this chasm come into existence?

The chasm between the rich man and Lazarus was created by the rich man's refusal to acknowledge and aid Lazarus during his lifetime. This human-made division, a result of the rich man's self-centredness, selfishness, and failure to love his neighbour, was reinforced by his fixed spiritual state in the afterlife, preventing any possibility of a return to earthly life to bridge the gap. The chasm is not a divine judgment on wealth itself, but a consequence of the rich man's failure to exercise compassion, to love God, and to love his neighbour. We know that the chasm was not created one fine morning, all of a sudden. First, it may have appeared as a small scratch, unnoticed by the rich man. Left alone, the scratch grew to a pothole. Untreated and unfixed, the pothole will eventually grow into a great chasm. If he had noticed and treated it at its beginnings, he might have ended up as the 'good rich man' with a good heart, and to finally be able to reach heaven.



My dear brothers and sisters, let us reflect on this: do we have a chasm in our own lives, or do we have potholes or scratches? Let us fix it. Let us fill it with the concrete of love, mercy, hope, compassion, and kindness. Jesus even presented us with a ready-made solution to fix any gap that we may have created: “Whatsoever you do to the least of my brothers that you do unto me. When I was hungry you gave me to eat. When I was thirsty you gave me to drink. Now enter into the home of My Father...”

Lazarus may be lying anywhere and everywhere; in our neighbourhoods, in our family, and in our workplace. The Lazarus that we meet may be suffering from a lack of food; a lack of love; a lack of care; or the pain of being neglected in their family, by society. Sometimes, our parish, our church can be another Lazarus struggle to meet the needs. If we can donate, a little more than what we do now, we will be able to do many things for our community, for our church. Helping church in its needs is also a practice of the Catholic Faith.

The five precepts of the Catholic Church are:

1. Attend Mass on Sundays and days of obligation
2. Confess your sins at least once a year
3. Receive the Eucharist at least once a year
4. Observe days of fasting and abstinence
5. Provide for the needs of the Church.

So my dear brothers and sisters, let's fill the gaps that we may have created between us, and our brothers and sisters. St. Paul also taught how this can be done in our lives. His advice for his beloved disciple, Timothy, was: “But as for you, man of God, shun all this; pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called and for which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.” (1 Timothy 11-12)

We are called to live our baptismal life in all the moments of our lives; by loving God with all our heart, all our soul, and with all our mind; and to love our brothers and sisters as ourselves.