

Synopsis: OT XXVI (Sept 25) Homily on Lk 16:19-31(L/16)

Introduction: The main theme of this Sunday's readings is the warning that the selfish and extravagant use of God's blessings, like wealth, without sharing them with the poor and the needy is a serious sin deserving eternal punishment. Today's readings stress the Covenant responsibility of the rich for the poor, reminding us of the truth that wealth without active mercy for the poor is great wickedness.

Scripture lessons: Amos, in the first reading, issues a powerful warning to those who seek wealth at the expense of the poor and who spend their time and their money on themselves alone. He prophesies that those rich and self-indulgent people will be punished by God with exile because they don't care for their poor and suffering brothers. The Psalm praises Yahweh, who cares for the poor. In the second reading, Paul admonishes us to "*pursue righteousness, devotion, faith, love, patience and gentleness*" – noble goals in an age of disillusionment – rather than riches. In today's Gospel, Jesus gives us a warning, pointing to the destiny of the rich man who neglected his duty to show mercy to poor Lazarus. The rich man was punished, not for having riches, but for neglecting the Scriptures and what they taught.

Life messages:1) We are all rich enough to share our blessings with others. God has blessed each one of us with wealth or health or special talents or social power or political influence or a combination of many blessings. The parable invites us to share what we have been given with others in various ways instead of using everything exclusively for selfish gains.

2) We need to remember that sharing is the criterion of Last Judgment: Matthew (25: 31ff) tells us that all six questions to be asked of each one of us by Jesus when He comes in glory as our judge are based on how we have shared our blessings from him (food, drink, home, mercy and compassion), with others.

3) We need to treat the unborn as our brother/sister, Lazarus. The Lazarus of the 20th century is also our preborn brother and sister. Many of these babies are brutally executed in their mother's wombs. Their cries for a chance to live are rejected 4400 times a day in our country. The rich man was condemned for not treating Lazarus as his brother. We also will be condemned for our selfishness if we do not treat the preborn as our brothers and sisters.

4) Our choices here determine the kind of eternity we will have. It has been put this way: "Where we go hereafter depends on what we go after, here." Where we will

arrive depends on what road we travel. We will get what we choose, what we live for. We are shaping our moral character to fit in one of two places.

OT XXVI [C] (Sept 25): Am 6:1a, 4-7; 1Tm 6:11-16; Lk 16:19-31

Anecdote: # 1: The parable that challenged Dr. Albert Schweitzer: What parable would make a man with three doctoral degrees (one in medicine, one in theology, one in philosophy), leave civilization with all its culture and amenities and depart for the jungles of darkest Africa to serve as a missionary doctor for 47 years? What parable could induce a man, who was recognized as one of the best concert organists in all Europe, to go to a place where there were no organs to play? What parable would so intensely motivate a man that he would give up a teaching position in Vienna, Austria to go to help people who were so deprived that they were still living in the superstitions of the dark ages, for all practical purposes? The man of course was Dr. Albert Schweitzer who won the [Nobel Peace Prize](#) in [1952](#), and the single parable that so radically altered his life, according to him, was our text for this morning, the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, the beggar. That parable convinced Schweitzer that the rich, Europe, should share its riches with the poor, Africa, and that he should start the process.

2: Half to doctors and half to lawyers: Cecil John Rhodes was an enormously wealthy man. He was an [English-born businessman](#), mining [magnate](#), and [politician](#) in [South Africa](#). He was the founder of the diamond company [De Beers](#), which today markets 40% of the world's rough diamonds and at one time marketed 90%. An ardent believer in [colonialism](#) and [imperialism](#), he was the founder of the state of [Rhodesia](#) to perpetuate his name. One day a newspaperman asked him, "You must be very happy." Rhodes replied, "Happy! No! I spent my life amassing a fortune only to find that I have spent half of it on doctors to keep me out of the grave, and the other half on lawyers to keep me out of jail!" He reminds us of the rich man in Jesus' parable in today's Gospel.

3: "The Fortunate Fifth" versus the "Forgotten Four-Fifths". America is increasingly becoming a caste society. We call it a two-coupon society - with severe social separation of the two coupon clippers. The top 10 or 20 percent of the population (50 million), clip their stock coupons and treasury certificates. Their kids go to private schools, while the public schools are deteriorating. Their mail goes Federal Express while the postal service is deteriorating. Their bottled water is delivered to the door while the water system becomes more and more

contaminated. The rest of Americans, 200 million, are standing at supermarket check-outs, the poorest members clipping food stamps, while the dwindling middle-class members clip food coupons. Doug Henwood calls this "The Fortunate Fifth" versus the "Forgotten Four-Fifths." Neither group is able to see reality as it is – one group has its head in the clouds, arched in the air above the pain and poverty, while the other has its head in the sand and dirt, enmeshed in the grind and grime of eking out a living in a service economy and unable to lift up its heads for hope or help or anything much else beyond survival. Whitehead groups the poor class into the "traditional poor" (primarily holding part-time service occupations with no benefits), and a frighteningly expanding new group of the poorer than poor known widely as "the underclass" - two million-plus Americans who are permanently homeless and psychologically hopeless, without voice or face in popular culture. New York University's Lawrence M. Mead shows how many of the ghetto poor are "seceding from mainstream institutions - breaking the law, dropping out of school, not learning English, declining to work." This "internal secession" he deems as threatening to the nation as the South's secession in 1861. [See Mead, "The Democrats' Dilemma," *Commentary* 93 (January 1992), 44.] Like the rich man and Lazarus in today's Gospel parable, these two groups are separated by a chasm predetermined by their economic status.

Introduction: The main theme of this Sunday is the warning that the selfish and extravagant use of God's blessings, like wealth, with no share going to the poor and the needy, is a serious sin deserving eternal punishment. Today's readings stress the truth that wealth without active mercy for the poor is great wickedness. Amos, in the first reading, issues a powerful warning to those who seek wealth at the expense of the poor and who spend their time and their money only on themselves. He prophesies that those rich and self-indulgent people will be punished by God with exile because they don't care for their poor and suffering brothers. The Psalm praises Yahweh, who cares for the poor. In the second reading, Paul admonishes us to "*pursue righteousness, devotion, faith, love, patience and gentleness*" – noble goals in an age of disillusionment – rather than riches. In today's Gospel, Jesus gives us a warning, pointing to the destiny of the rich man who neglected his duty to show mercy to poor Lazarus. The rich man was punished, not for having riches, but for neglecting the Scriptures and what they taught.

First reading, [Amos 6:1, 4-7](#): Amos' message from the Lord God was couched in a series of oracles, words and woes, and visions. Today's first reading (Amos 6:1a, 4-7), is taken from the third woe (6:1-14), concerning self-indulgence, an excellent companion text for today's Gospel. The prophet Amos laments the self-indulgence

and fraternal indifference of the wealthy both in Zion (Southern Kingdom) and Samaria (Northern Kingdom, to which the Lord God had sent Amos as His prophet), who are “living a life of luxury, heedless of the misfortunes of others, of the ‘ruin of Joseph,’” notes the Navarre Bible. Because of this, the people of the Northern Kingdom will be conquered by the Assyrians and will go into exile first. They did so in 721 BC. The *collapse of Joseph* is not Judah’s collapse. But by designating the Northern Kingdom “*Joseph*,” the Lord God, through Amos, calls attention to the patriarchal traditions Israel shares with Judah. What kind of brother satisfies expensive tastes while his younger brother suffers? The Lord God tells them that the solidarity one expects of a brother cannot be found among Judah’s elite either; they, too, are people who prefer good food and drink to coming to the aid of other suffering members of the same family. Hence, the Lord God says that He will punish those rich and unsympathetic people of Judah with exile as well. The prophecy was fulfilled when the Southern Kingdom – Judah with Jerusalem as its capital- was razed to the ground in 587 BC by the army of Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar, and its elite rich were led to a humiliating and punishing exile in Babylon.

Second Reading, [1 Timothy 6:11-16](#): Timothy held a position in the church at Ephesus like that of the modern Bishop. He was relatively young and of mixed Jewish and Gentile parentage. In the letter, the senior apostle Paul gives the young bishop advice and encouragement. After warning Timothy (6: 10) that “*the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the Faith and pierced themselves with many pains,*” he reminds Timothy, the ordained priest and consecrated Bishop, of the Faith he had confessed at his Baptism, of his obligation to “pursue righteousness, devotion, faith love, patience and gentleness” and of his ongoing call to bear witness to Christ as a loyal teacher and practitioner of that Faith. The message for us is that the generous sharing of our talents and resources is the necessary response of our Christian commitment.

Exegesis: Objectives: Jesus told this parable to condemn the Pharisees for their love of money and lack of mercy for the poor. He also used the parable to correct three Jewish misconceptions held and taught by the Sadducees: 1) Material prosperity in this life is God’s reward for moral uprightness, while poverty and illness are God’s punishment for sins. Hence, there is no need to help the poor and the sick for they have been cursed by God. 2) Since wealth is a sign of God’s blessing, the best way of thanking God is to enjoy it by leading a life of luxury and self-indulgence in dress, eating and drinking, of course, after giving God His portion as tithe. 3) The parable also addresses the false doctrine of the Sadducees denying the survival of

the soul after death, and the consequent retribution our deeds and neglects in this life receive in the next. Jesus challenges these misconceptions through the parable and condemns the rich who ignore the poor they encounter. The parable also offers an invitation to each one of us to be conscious of the sufferings of those around us and to share our blessings generously.

One-act-play: The parable is presented as a one act play with two scenes. The opening scene presents the luxurious life of the rich man in costly dress, enjoying five course meals every day, in contrast to the miserable life of the poor and sick beggar living in the street by the rich man's front door, competing with stray dogs for the crumbs discarded from the rich man's dining table. As the curtain goes up for the second scene, the situation is reversed. The beggar Lazarus is enjoying Heavenly bliss as a reward for his fidelity to God in his poverty and suffering, while the rich man is thrown down into the excruciating suffering of Hell as punishment for not doing his duty of showing mercy to the poor by sharing with the beggar at his door the mercies and blessings God has given him

Why punish the innocent? Naturally, we are tempted to ask the question, why was the rich man punished? He did not drive either the poor beggar or the stray dogs from in front of his door nor did he prevent either from sharing the discarded crumbs and leftovers from his table. The Fathers of the Church find three culpable omissions in the rich man in the parable. a) He neglected the poor beggar at his door by not helping him to treat his illness or giving him a small house to live in. b) He ignored the scrolls of Sacred Scriptures kept on his table reminding him of Yahweh's commandment in the book of Leviticus (15: 7-11) "*Don't deny help to the poor. Be liberal in helping the widows and the homeless.*" c) He led a life of luxury and self-indulgence totally ignoring the poor people around him, with Cain's attitude: "*Am I the guardian of my brother?*" It is not wrong to be rich, but it is wrong not to share our blessings with our less fortunate brothers and sisters.

The lessons taught: This parable teaches important lessons: a) It reminds us that eventually all of us will experience God's justice after our death ("*particular judgment*"), when we are asked to give an account of our lives. b) It points to the Law and the Prophets (the Sacred Scriptures), as ways to learn how to practice righteousness and sacrificial sharing. c) It looks ahead to our resurrection ("*neither will they be convinced if someone rises from the dead*"), and the reality that the people who heed nothing and die unrepentant will suffer for it. d) God permits injustices in this life, though not in the next. e) Perhaps the main lesson of this

parable is that supreme self-love is total moral depravity, and making self-gratification one's supreme goal in life does not merely lead to sin – it *is* sin.

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3) We need to treat the unborn as our brother/sister, Lazarus. The Lazarus of the 21st century is also our preborn brother and our preborn sister. These babies are brutally executed in their mother's wombs. Their cries for a chance to live are rejected 4400 times a day in our country. This Lazarus is the person torn apart and thrown away by abortion. The rich man was condemned for not treating Lazarus as his brother. We also will be condemned for our selfishness if we do not treat the preborn as our brother and sister. "Who am I to interfere with a woman's choice to abort?" I am a brother, a sister of that child in the womb! I am a human being who has enough decency to stand up and say "NO!" when I see another human being about to be killed. I am a person gifted with enough wisdom to realize that injustice to one human being is injustice to every human being, and that my own life is only as safe as the life of the preborn child. Finally, I am a follower of the One who said, "Whatsoever you do to the least of my brothers, you do to me."

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(Prepared by Fr. Tony (stjohngrandbay.org) and published by CBCI)