

Twenty-sixth Sunday Ordinary Time

In the last few weeks in our Gospel readings we have heard Jesus give some examples of human behavior that shows our sinfulness. Two weeks ago, we heard the parable about the prodigal son (see Lk 15:1-32). The younger son did not care about his father. He only wanted his inheritance so that he could go off and have fun. Once his money ran out, and he became very hungry, only then did he consider going back to his father. His main motivation for going back was that he was poor and hungry and he wanted to fill his belly.

One week ago, we heard about the dishonest steward (see Lk 16:1-13). This steward was using his position of authority to make a dishonest profit for himself. When he was caught and the master was going to fire him, the steward schemed to get in the good graces of the master's clients so that he might have a job waiting for him with one of the clients. The steward was a wheeler dealer. Much like the prodigal son, the dishonest steward was only thinking of himself, and how he could have an easier life.

Today we heard about the rich man who wore fine clothing and ate sumptuously every day (see Lk 16:19-31). However, things did not turn out too well for him once he died. What was his sinful behavior that led to him being in the fires of hell? Much like the prodigal son and the dishonest steward, the rich man only thought about himself. He already had an easy life. He wore purple garments. Purple was a very expensive dye, and so only the wealthy could afford to have purple colored clothes. He ate sumptuously every day. He didn't eat moderately or fast. He ate the finest food, and a lot of it, every day. And by thinking only of himself and his own pleasure, he was blind to the needs of others, even to the point of being blind to the needs of poor Lazarus at his door. It's kind of like the attitude, "Well, I have mine. Let everybody else take care of themselves."

The rich man didn't care about the suffering of others. His blindness was in part due to allowing his heart to become hardened. This is not something that happens overnight. This hardening of a heart happens slowly over time. As a heart becomes more and more hardened, the person will become more and more indifferent to others. A hard heart will lead to a lack of compassion and concern for the welfare of others. As we heard in the Gospel reading, Lazarus was starving, his body was covered with sores, and even though he was directly outside the rich man's door, it was as if Lazarus was not even there to the rich man.

The great chasm that was mentioned in the Gospel reading was something that developed in this life for the rich man. It wasn't something that only came into existence in the next world. The rich man caused that chasm to develop in this world by his lack of care and concern for the poor. The rich man allowed this chasm to develop here and now. The poor were of no concern to him. It was as if they didn't even exist.

We can allow a chasm to develop between us and others if we aren't careful. We will allow this to happen if we let our hearts become hardened. If we become indifferent to the poor and suffering; if we aren't willing to help relieve the suffering of others, then our hearts may become quite hard. We too will become blind to the poor and suffering around us.

Thank goodness that we have a loving Savior that will never abandon us. Jesus is the Good Shepherd that will always seek out the lost. He will always take care of the suffering through the good deeds of others. We have an example of that in Mother Teresa of Kolkata. The poor, starving, and dying people of the slums were being ignored by the people. They were dying in the streets. Mother Teresa went into the depths of this misery and started taking care of these people. She helped them to know that there was somebody that cared for them before they died. Mother Teresa was that presence of Christ for others. She was that person of compassion and that face of love for people that thought nobody cared for them. This happened because she opened her heart to Christ. She allowed Jesus to fill her heart with His love. And by doing this, her eyes were opened to see those that needed help. Her heart was moved with compassion to do something for these people rather than ignore them too.

In our second reading, St. Paul exhorts Timothy to “compete well for the faith. Lay hold of eternal life.” (see 1 Tim 6:11-16) How do we compete well for the faith, and lay hold of eternal life? We need to open our hearts constantly to the Lord and allow His love to fill us. This means that we have to spend time in prayer and seek out the Lord. Once our hearts are transformed by His love, our eyes will be opened. The Holy Spirit will open our eyes to be able to see the needs of others. Our hearts will be moved with compassion to want to help them in some way. We will want to help relieve their suffering. We will want to be the light and presence of Jesus for them. And by doing this we will be closing the chasm that divides us. The more charity that we show to others will help to eliminate the chasm completely. And then when our time comes to leave this earth, we too will be met by angels who will carry us to the bosom of a loving Savior. He will embrace us and give us the rest and peace that only He can give. May we open our hearts and minds to the love of Jesus so that, one day, we may enjoy the inheritance of eternal life that is promised to us.