

# Opening the Word: Complacency is the road to hell



We don't know a good deal about the rich man. We don't know his name. We don't know his occupation. We only know that he is rich, he had sumptuous banquets and never noticed Lazarus outside his door longing for food.

We don't know much about Lazarus, either. He is poor, suffering from a skin disease. Dogs lick his sores as he waits outside the rich man's gate. He does notice the rich man's banquets, longing for just a scrap of food.

Nothing is given.

The rich man and Lazarus die. Lazarus enters heaven while the rich man is cast into the nether world.

Notice that the persistent sin of the rich man is not his explicit disregard of Lazarus. He doesn't pass by him, yelling at Lazarus to get a job.

He doesn't notice Lazarus at all. His sin is complacency.

The blindness of the rich man is egregious according to the law of Israel. Almsgiving is not an optional practice for the faithful. It is a commandment.

The God who has given the world as a gift, who gave the Law as gift, who gave the land as gift, wants Israel to give gifts to the hungry, the thirsty, the lonely, the widow and the orphan.

The rich man's complacency is not merely against Lazarus. It is against God, against the Law written by the hand of the Lord.

26th Sunday in  
Ordinary Time – Sept.

29

Am 6:1, 4-7

Ps 146:7, 8-9, 9-10

1 Tm 6:11-16

Lk 16:19-31

The rich man didn't even have to go far to carry out his duty. Lazarus was just outside his gate. And yet the rich man is like those whom Amos castigates, "the complacent in Zion" who dine inclined upon their ivory couches, all the while enjoying pleasant music (Am 6:1).

When the rich man hears of his judgment, he doesn't protest. Instead, he now asks that Lazarus serve him. Go and get me some water. Go and tell my brothers. Warn them.

In both cases, Father Abraham does not respond with mercy. You received good things on earth, ignoring Lazarus. Why do you think you deserve comfort now? Your brothers have been warned. They had Moses and the prophets. Why would they listen to Lazarus? Why would they listen to someone risen from the dead?

The last words of Abraham in the Gospel are chilling. Jesus's parables ask us to take sides. And we tend to take the side of the good guy. We find ourselves in judgment of the rich man, almost hoping that he gets what he deserves.

But then the parable turns on us. We have encountered one risen from the dead, who preached to us a kingdom of the poor. We have been told by the apostles, echoing his words, to share all things in common, to join in prayer, to live in harmony, to love one another unto the end.

And yet, are we not the ones who are complacent? Have we listened to the voice of Jesus?

The Church is not some nice society of pleasant people who do

pancake breakfasts and trivia nights.

The Church is made up of those who have been convoked by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We are those who strive not for a pleasant life, of relative calm, but salvation.

For us Christians, complacency is the road to hell.

It is the hell of contempt for the poor. It is the hellacious contempt toward God.

Unlike the rich man, there's still time for us to stop being complacent.

Start by looking outside your gate to discover there the Lazarus waiting for a morsel of food, a kind word, a love that unites rather than isolates.

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