

Loving Those Who Are Hard to Love

Fr. Tom Pringle

Hey there everyone, Father Tom Pringle here from the diocese of Orlando, I'm assigned to Holy Name of Jesus Catholic Church in the Melbourne area of Florida. And it's again, an honor for me to be with all of you for this session where we will be diving more deeply into the parable of the rich man and Lazarus from the Gospel of Luke.

But before we get to that point, though, let's begin with a short prayer. *In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen. Most loving Father we give you thanks and praise for the many incredible blessings you have given to each of us throughout our lives. The most, especially the graces you have given to us during this Lenten season. We ask that over the remaining days of this Holy time you may abundantly pour out a spirit of receptivity into our hearts so that we can more generously respond to your invitation, to deeper intimacy and relationship, help us to see you in all that we do but especially in those that we encounter in our lives. Change our hearts this season. We ask this in the name of your Son, Jesus, our Lord, Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.*

The Rich Man and Lazarus

So, to begin this session, I would like to read the parable, the rich man and Lazarus. And it comes from the 16th chapter of the Gospel of Luke and its verses 19 to 31. Again, that's Luke 16:19-31. *"There was a rich man who dressed in purple garments and fine linen and dined sumptuously each day. And lying at his door was a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who had gladly have eaten his fill of the scraps that fell from the rich man's table. Dogs even used to come and lick his sores.*

When the poor man died, he was carried away by angels to the bosom of Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried, and from the netherworld, where he was in torment, he raised his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. He cried out, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me. Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am suffering torment in these flames.' Abraham replied, 'My child, remember that you received what was good during your lifetime while Lazarus likewise received what was bad; but now he is comforted here, whereas you are tormented. Moreover, between us and you a great chasm is established to prevent anyone from crossing who might wish to go from our side to yours or from your side to ours.'

He said, 'Then I beg you, father, send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers, so that he may warn them, lest they too come to this place of torment.' But Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the prophets. Let them listen to them.' He said, 'Oh no, father Abraham, but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' Then Abraham said, 'If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone should rise from the dead.'"

Calling Out the Pharisees

My brothers and sisters, the gospel of the Lord. So, I'd like to begin with posing a question to each of us, who is your Lazarus? Who is your Lazarus? It may not be someone sitting right outside of your front door, but every single one of us has at least one person in our lives that we struggle to love with Christian charity. So, I ask again, who is your Lazarus? The passage that we have just heard is known as the parable of the rich man and Lazarus.

Again, it's unique to the Gospel of Luke. And that should come as no surprise to any of us that Jesus is directing this parable to the Pharisees. Throughout this middle section of the Gospel of Luke Jesus is really driving home the message that the Pharisees have very much fallen short of meeting the standard of how religious leaders should be the examples for the rest of the community. He's calling out the social and religious superiors for not doing as God had commanded them.

We've seen it time and time again with Jesus, how He calls out the Pharisees for their love of money, position, authority, power, you name it. In fact, in just the last couple of chapters leading up to this point, Jesus has offered the parable of the lost sheep, the lost coin, the prodigal son and the dishonest steward. All of these are pointing to how the religious leaders of the Jewish community have been failing to do what God desires. And instead, are focused primarily on advancing their own agendas. They're only concerned with themselves.

Failing to See God

Here in the 16th chapter of Luke, there's two parables focusing on the use of riches. First is a dishonest steward who squanders his master's wealth, and then we have the rich man and Lazarus which we've just read. The verses that come between the two parables are meant to focus attention on how the Pharisees are lovers of money and strict observers of the law. Jesus is pointing out how the Pharisees are so focused on carrying out the appropriate ritual practices and following the law so zealously that they are failing to see those who are right in front of them. They were failing to take care of those whom God had put right in front of their faces, they were failing to see God. They were so focused on the minute details that they ended up missing the bigger picture. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus isn't just directed at the Pharisees though, it's also directed to us today.

A Deeper Understanding of Jesus's Words

Let's dive more deeply into what we can learn from Jesus's words in this parable. Especially as we journey throughout this season of Lent. The parable begins with Jesus explaining the luxurious nature of the rich man's life, fine garments and scrumptious food. Are we constantly relying on extravagance and comfort in our life? Perhaps even feeling that we deserve it. Does this give us an over-reliance on material goods leading us to be indifferent to those around us who are suffering in a need? Jesus describes Lazarus in such a state of distress, sores all over his body longing for scraps from the table. Where's the rich man's compassion?

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Where's his awareness of the needs of his neighbor that he could easily help to fill? That should prompt us to ask the question. Are there areas in our lives where we are lacking compassion for the suffering of others? Where we are indifferent to the needs of others, to the needs that others have that we may be able to fill. Perhaps looking at the poverty and the physical needs of many in the world around us today, can at times seem overwhelming and it can. But even if it is in a small and simple way, God is calling each of us to give with hearts full of generosity.

Who are you Struggling to love?

And so, I invite us as part of our Lenten prayer and almsgiving, to consider if there is an area where the Lord is asking us to give or is there a specific person that we might be called to assist? I invite us to pray with those questions and see where the Lord might be leading us, ask God who is He asking us to reach out to? Who is He asking us to serve? And then allow His love to move through us to bless someone in need. I also want to bring us back to the question that I asked at the beginning of this talk, who is your Lazarus?

In addition to this parable, drawing our attention to the physically poor and needy, it also gives us the opportunity to examine if there is a person or a group of people in our lives that we ignore, be little, or think of as less than ourselves. Perhaps it's an estranged family member, a former spouse, someone who's hurt us, a former coworker, a classmate, the list could go on and on and on. Ultimately, who is someone that we really struggled to love and therefore give ourselves permission to judge and disregard. Can we really allow ourselves to believe that God loves them any less because we find it hard to love them?

God Has No Favorites

The reality is that God loves these individuals with abundance. They're beloved to Him. In any ways that we are lacking compassion, harboring resentment, or giving ourselves permission to stay hurt, angry or in a state of unforgiveness, God is calling us out of that today. He doesn't want us to stay in this place of hardheartedness, He desires to transform our hearts and give us the ability to see with newness His ways of love and forgiveness.

God has no favorites; I'm going to say that again. God has no favorites; He loves each of us the same. He showers the same grace, the same mercy, the same love upon every single one of us. It doesn't matter who we are. In turn, we cannot just love those that we find it easy to love, those whom it's beneficial to love. Jesus is calling us out for that in the same way that He's calling out the Pharisees for it. If we long to be with God in heaven one day and I hope we all do.

A Challenge to Examine Our Life

Now, now is the time for us to love others well in a merciful, compassionate and self-giving way. This Lenten season the Lord is challenging us to examine our lives. Who are the people that we find it difficult to love? Who is our Lazarus? Spend time being honest with ourselves over the

next few days about this question and bring it to the Lord in prayer and then consider, do we pray for those that we find it difficult to love? Do we offer mass for them?

We can all offer a personal intention at the masses that we attend. Do that, offer a rosary for them. Instead of giving ourselves permission to gossip or speak ill of these individuals, do we challenge ourselves to speak about them with kindness and charity? Have we reached out to those who are strange to us and offered forgiveness where it's needed? These practices might be difficult at first, but we need to start building up these habits that foster charity and forgiveness. If we are seeking to truly live as disciples of Jesus and hearing His words to us in this parable.

Who is Your Lazarus?

Jesus doesn't want our story to end like the rich man's story, it's not too late for us. Yet, God is giving us more time, He's giving us the opportunity to make right the ways in which we have been unloving and indifferent to the needs of others. We've experienced the love and mercy of God, and now we're called to bring that same love that same mercy to others, especially to those whom it is difficult for us to love. God doesn't play favorites, neither should we. Who is your Lazarus? And are you willing to allow them to change your heart?

Closing Prayer

Let's pray. *In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen. Lord Jesus, open our eyes that we may see you in all our brothers and sisters. Open our minds that we may understand their hopes and dreams, their sorrows and pain, they're longing for you. Open our hearts to give generously of ourselves, grant us wisdom to respond effectively to the needs of your people with grace and compassion. Give us the courage to speak your words of life, peace, love, mercy and human solidarity. We ask this in your most Holy name, Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.*