

September 28th, Proper 26

Opening Prayers:

Holy God,
you reach out to us to save us
so that we may live as your faithful servants alone.
Unchain us from our desire for wealth and power
so that we, in turn, release others
from prisons, poverty, hunger and oppression.
We ask this through the One
who rose from the dead,
Jesus Christ our Lord,
who with you and the Holy Spirit is one God,
now and for ever.

Amos 6:1a, 4-7: *Like last Sunday's reading from Amos, in this reading God condemns those who revel in living lives of ease with no notice or care of those in desperate situations. In fact, we hear, they will be the first to be dragged into exile. Note: It is not their wealth that causes God's displeasure, but their utter lack of concern for the needy that results in God's displeasure.*

Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and trust in the mountain of Samaria, which are named chief of the nations, to whom the house of Israel came!
That lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall;
That chant to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of music, like David;
That drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments: but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph.
Therefore now shall they go captive with the first that go captive, and the banquet of them that stretched themselves shall be removed.

1 Timothy 6:1-11: *Paul urged Timothy as a "man of God" to shun the love of money and instead to "pursue" spiritual riches like goodness, love, gentleness, etc. This is certainly a fight in which we are all engaged, Paul wrote, but the victory has been won by God who called him (and you) to eternal life and by the Lord Christ who testified about God before Pontius Pilate. Finally, Paul addressed wealthy members of the Church to be "rich" in good deeds, being generous as God is generous, laying a good (and eternal) foundation for their lives.*

Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed.

And they that have believing masters, let them not despise them, because they are brethren; but rather do them service, because they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the benefit. These things teach and exhort.

If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness;

He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings,

Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself.

But godliness with contentment is great gain.

For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.

And having food and raiment let us be therewith content.

But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.

For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness.

Luke 16:19-31: *The Pharisees were known to love money and to dress in finery. So Jesus told a parable that is a thinly veiled attack on their lifestyles, about an unnamed rich man and a poor one, named Lazarus (which means “God helps”). After their deaths there is a great reversal – Lazarus is in paradise with Abraham and the uncaring rich man is tormented in Hades. In this case, Jesus overturned conventional Jewish wisdom: it was said that wealth was a sign of being blessed by God; if one was poor, one must be ungodly. Instead, what matters to God is the attitude of our hearts and how we live our lives, how we care for one another.*

Jesus told this parable to those among the Pharisees that loved money. There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day:

And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores,

And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.

And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into

Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried;
And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.

And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.

But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.

And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence.

Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house:

For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment.

Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.

And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.

And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

Jesus told a frightening parable about a rich man who had everything and a poor man who had nothing. Which would you want to be? Oh, come on, be honest. You'd want to be the rich man, wouldn't you? Armani suits, linen tablecloths, servants waiting on your every need, a Rolls in the garage, a Ferrari for the weekends, the finest meats cooked to perfection, the best vintage wines from your endless cellar. Who wouldn't want to be him? He's living the life! We want to be this guy, or at least, to have a little piece of his pie.

At the end of his driveway is a guy named Lazarus. Who on earth would want to be Lazarus? Dumpster diving the rich man's garbage, searching for a bite to eat, even a few crumbs of that fresh sourdough baguette, maybe a few bones with some meat left on them. His skin was covered with oozing sores. His only caregivers were the dogs that hung around to lick his sores. Oh, yes, give me the life of the filthy rich man over filthy Lazarus any day of the week.

Who would want to be Lazarus?

Every evening the rich man looked out his window, down the driveway, to the gate. He'd stand there in his satin bathrobe, with a gin and tonic in hand, and he'd look down the drive at old Lazarus with the dogs, and he'd think to himself, "There but by the grace of God go I. Poor sucker. He must have done something wrong to deserve this." But ironically he couldn't be more wrong.

One day, they both dropped dead. Death is the great equalizer – rich and poor die pretty much the same. The rich man died a little more comfortably on his Sleep Comfort bed or in his Lazy Boy chair; Lazarus died in the street. But both of them were equally dead. Death reveals the hidden truth, something that wasn't so apparent in this life. Lazarus was faithful, full of faith in the promises of God even in his emptiness, he hungered and thirsted for God and now is satisfied. The rich man rejected God just as he rejected Lazarus; he was faith-less. He winds up in Hades, while Lazarus winds up at Abraham's side.

Everything is reversed. Lazarus is blessed, the rich man is cursed. Lazarus is comforted, the rich man tormented. The rich man tried to bargain, but his bargaining days are over. He became mission-minded. He had five unbelieving brothers, probably just as hedonistic as he was. "Send Lazarus to them. They'll be impressed. Lazarus risen from the dead. That'll shake them out of their drunken stupor."

We are all beggars before God. This is true. We are all beggars. Lazarus, each of us, begging, hungry, wounded, sick, sore. And the good news is that Jesus has joined us there, among the dogs, the outcasts, the losers. A beggar to save the beggars. You have Christ. You have the Word of Christ, greater than Moses and the prophets. You have the Word made flesh. Your sins are forgiven in Jesus. Your death is destroyed in Jesus. Hell has no power over you because you are in Jesus.

Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Concluding Prayers

Let us pray for Charles, our king, and those who lead the peoples of the earth, that they may be strengthened in integrity and to their call to service.

Let us pray for our Parish and for Christians everywhere, that we may be rich in good works and generously share what we have.

Let us pray that our eyes may be open to see poverty and human need, and that seeing, we may act justly.

Let us pray for an end to the abyss between rich and poor, in our community, in this nation, and throughout the world.

Let us pray for us pray that our young people may learn to love charity, justice, and a gentle spirit.

Let us pray for the aged, the infirm, the lonely, and the homeless

Let us pray that those who are imprisoned for the sake of the gospel may bear bold and glad witness to the Lord,

Have mercy on us, O God of justice!
Hear our cry and save us.
Make us heed your word
spoken to Moses and the prophets.
Rouse us to the demand of the Gospel
Proclaimed by your Son.
Impel us to carry it out,
Grant this through your Son,
our Lord Jesus Christ,
who lives and reigns with you God os
and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

For our Parish.

O GOD the Holy Ghost, Sanctifier of the faithful:
Sanctify this parish by thine abiding presence
especially at this time when some feel they cannot gather together.
Enlighten the minds of thy people more and more
with the light of the everlasting Gospel.
Bring erring souls to the knowledge of God our Saviour;
and those who are walking in the way of life,
keep steadfast unto the end.

Give patience to the sick and afflicted,
and renew them in body and soul.
Guard from forgetfulness of thee those who are strong and prosperous.
Increase in us thy manifold gifts of grace,
and make us all to be fruitful in good works;
O blessed Spirit, whom with the Father and the Son together
we worship and glorify, one God, world without end. *Amen.*

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.

THE peace of God, which passeth all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God,
and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord:
And the blessing of God Almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, be amongst you and remain with you
always. *Amen*