

Twenty-sixth Sunday Per Annum (C)
September 25, 2016.

As for you, man of God; pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness (1 Tim. 6:11).

The parable of Lazarus and the rich man is found only in the Gospel of St. Luke. As the scribe of Our Lord's meekness or gentleness, St. Luke records a parable that was one of the most frequently illustrated parables in medieval art, perhaps because of its vivid account of the afterlife or because it addresses the universal question of mercy and compassion in the face of suffering; and our duty to alleviate the suffering of others. This obligation is very simply ours because Our Lord has clearly said, *Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me (Mt. 25:40)*. These very familiar words are from the parable of the Last Judgment. A very important truth is conveyed to us by these parables; namely, that God Himself is honoured and served by our compassion and in turn, that the practice of mercy will be the measure of our judgment.

What can we learn from this parable beyond what is very evident simply at the literal level? Evidently, we should extend mercy and compassion to the poor. God will surely judge us. This is clear. Perhaps the name that Our Lord gives to the poor man contains the very heart of the parable, whether we are charitable through the works of mercy or we are the recipients of this charity. This lesson; that of trust in God's help in both our need and in the generous exercise of Christian charity is found in the very name of the poor man in the parable: *Lazarus*, in Hebrew, *Eleazar*, a name which means *God is my help*. If we have raised a family or have looked after ailing parents or relatives, all of us have performed the corporal works of mercy: we have fed the hungry, clothed the naked, and sheltered the homeless. Sometimes we have done these things at the cost of great sacrifice and in the midst of great uncertainty and yet we persevered and we were generous, perhaps heroically so. It is our trust in God and His Divine Providence that enables us to do this and even more. Sometimes the most self-evident truths are the ones we fail to appreciate.

Our help is in the Name of the Lord; Who made heaven and earth. This is a verse that is often recited especially in prayers of both supplication and blessing. The conviction of God's sovereignty and care for us His children and for all His creation is at the very heart of our relationship with Our Heavenly Father. That is why before we are nourished with the Food of the Eucharist we dare to say, *Our Father*. As we worship, so we become; and so it is not surprising that those souls who are most faithful to prayer and to sacrifice more perfectly make present the love and mercy of God. This is very evident in the life of St. Teresa of Calcutta who, as you well know, was recently canonized. *As for you...pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness (1 Tim. 6:11)*. These words are addressed to all of us; and the prayerful pursuit of these virtues is the work of a lifetime. Our Lord calls us not simply to walk after Him but to imitate the pattern of His life; so that trusting in His grace and goodness, we might re-present, literally make present here and now the full measure of His mercy and kindness.

One of the most popular Saints of the Middle Ages was a former soldier, St. Martin of Tours, born of pagan parents around the year 316. There is an episode in his life often represented in art through

the ages. On a bitterly cold winter day, the young soldier on garrison duty rode through the city gates of Amiens in France, probably dressed in the regalia of his unit – gleaming flexible armor, ridged helmet, and a beautiful cloak whose upper section was lined with lambs wool. As he approached the gates he saw a beggar, with clothes so ragged that he was practically naked. The beggar must have been shaking and blue from the cold but no one reached out to help him. Martin, overcome with compassion, took off his mantle and in one quick stroke slashed the mantle in two with his sword, handed half to the freezing man and wrapped the remainder on his own shoulders. Many in the crowd thought this was so ridiculous a sight that they laughed and jeered but some realized they were seeing Christian goodness. That night Martin dreamed that he saw Our Lord wearing half the mantle he had given the beggar and Our Lord saying to the angels and saints that surrounded him. ‘*See! This is the mantle that Martin, yet a catechumen, gave me.*’ When he woke, it was the ‘*yet a catechumen*’ that spurred Martin on and he went immediately to be baptized. He was eighteen years old. Eventually Martin became a monk, a priest and eventually bishop of Tours, an outstanding shepherd. His biographer Simplicius Severus said of St. Martin that *he was a man in whom the compassion of Our Lord was continually revealed* (From a letter by Simplicius Severus, *The Liturgy of the Hours*, Vol. IV, p. 1553). In all humility and in a spirit of fervent Christian commitment, ideally, this should be said of each one of us as we endeavour to follow the example of Our Lord and pattern our life on His.

All of us will one day experience the particular judgment at the time of our death and please God, our good deeds will go before us. In our Latin liturgy these words of a chant known as the *In paradisum* are sung as the deceased is taken from the church to the cemetery, *May the ranks of angels receive you, and with Lazarus, who was poor, may you have eternal rest* (*Chorus angelorum te suscipiat, et cum Lazaro quondam pauper aeternam habeas requiem*). This is a reference to the Lazarus, Eleazar of our parable. If we keep in our minds and hearts the lessons of Our Lord and the example of the saints, our help in time of need will indeed be in the Name of the Lord and we too will become men and women in whom the compassion of Our Lord is continually revealed. Is there anything in life more worthy of endeavour? Let us then continue to *pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness*; that we too may one day be received Heaven, *carried away by the Angels to be with Abraham* (Lk. 16:22).

