

## 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time C/2010

An old saying states “Heaven helps those who help themselves”. The point of this saying is to bring us to understand the importance of our responsibility and our accountability when taking care of our business. No doubt that such a principal has contributed in many ways to the progress of people and their enterprise. The reverse side, however, is that people can be so concerned with themselves that they forget that even the things acquired through hard work are God’s gifts. If so, as stewards of God’s many gifts, we have to live in solidarity with our fellows and share with the less fortunate and the needy. That is the point today’s readings try to bring to our meditation.

In the first reading, the prophet Amos deplors the attitude of those who do not care about the ruin of Jerusalem. While the country is going down, they delight in their luxury and complacency. For that reason, they will be the first to experience deportation and exile.

What is behind this text is the idea that indifference is the source of misery for one who delights in his selfishness. The same act of indifference constitutes the drama that takes place in today’s Gospel between the rich man and the poor Lazarus

Note well that the Gospel does not say that the rich man was a mean person or someone who mistreated Lazarus. On the contrary, he was a respectful citizen and respected person in society. He never had any problem with anybody and never was he responsible for the situation of Lazarus. In that sense, it was normal to him that Lazarus should be what he was without his conscience being necessarily shocked or shaken.

If it is true that he did not do anything wrong to Lazarus, why is he now in trouble by the end of his life? For Jesus, the sin of the rich man is not about something he has done, but about what he did not do, namely to come to the help of Lazarus. Let us call that “the sin of omission”. He literally ignored Lazarus even as he lay at his doors in pain and hunger. He stayed completely indifferent before his suffering and toward him.

As a matter of fact, indifference makes someone insensitive and deaf to the cry of his fellows. It kills any prospect of solidarity toward the others. Indifference prevents us from seeing the pain and the suffering of our fellows, because it pushes us to not care, no matter how bad the situation is. In the end, indifference keeps us away from God who identifies himself with the poor and the needy.

Some people say that hell does not exist. When we read this Gospel, we realize that it does exist. In that sense, we can say that hell is a place of isolation and torment in which people risk finding themselves at the end of their lives when they do not live in solidarity with their fellows. Hell is a possibility of losing our eternal life when we do not act according to the law of love of God and of our neighbor.

Does God choose hell for us? No. We create it ourselves when we are indifferent to the misery of our fellows. That is what Abraham tells the rich man. And what leads to that place is the way

we live here on earth. That is why we have always to remember that the way we live on earth determines our future life.

By saying this, am I inviting us to live in fear of death? Or am I pushing us to feel guilty for things we should have done, but we did not? Not at all; rather my point is that we take seriously our commitment as Christians while we are still alive and repent of our sins.

As we see in the gospel, the distance between Lazarus in heaven and the rich man in the netherworld is not the result of God's judgment, but a result of a ditch that the rich man has dug for himself when he was still alive. The gap he has maintained on earth is maintained in heaven, but in a reversed order. What he has sown on earth, is what he harvests in the other world. In that sense, we can say that what comes after death depends on the way we live here on earth.

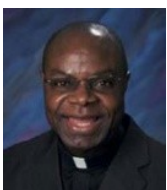
What do we learn from this parable? First, we learn that solidarity and relationship are decisive criteria for the life after death. For that reason, those who have enough should not say that they did not know about poverty and misery in their area. All this is exemplified in the case of the rich man who lived in selfishness surrounded by his goods and without involvement with the poor. Now in the after death, he is surprised that he is condemned for something he did not do.

The second thing we learn is about the importance of conversion here and now. In fact, we should never put off for tomorrow what we can do today, especially when it is about getting rid of our sins. The words of Abraham to the rich man are clear: "If your brothers do not listen to Moses and the prophets, even if someone should rise from the dead, they will not listen". Remember that human stubbornness before God is a source of trauma, as the misfortune of the rich is the result of the hardness of his heart and his ears.

The third thing we learn is that the foundation of our faith is the word of God and not in the apparitions of phantoms. When we fail to listen to the scriptures, we prepare our eternal ruin. That is why the rich man was wrong to think that his brothers would change if someone from the dead talked to them. There is only one who came from the dead and to whom we have to listen, Jesus Christ.

All that helps us understand why what St Paul reminds Timothy to do in his ministry is addressed to us. We have to pursue righteousness, devotion, faith, love, patience and gentleness. We have to compete well for the faith and to keep the commandment without blame until the appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us pray that the Lord in his mercy touch our hearts so that we come to listen to him and live in solidarity with one another, especially the poor and the needy. May God bless you all!



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Contact: [www.mbala.org](http://www.mbala.org)  
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**Daniel 6, 1a, 4-7; 1Timothy 6, 11-16; Luke 16, 19-31**