

Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time C/2016

The readings of this Sunday talk about the importance of human solidarity. They show that indifference is a vice that kills the fraternity between people. They invite us to pay attention to the wellbeing of our brothers and sisters by acting charitably toward them.

The first reading recalls God's complaints through the mouth of the prophet Amos about the rich men of Israel. It stigmatizes their selfishness and indifference while the country was going to ruin. Finally, it announces the misfortune of deportation and exile that will befall on them all.

What is behind this text is the idea that indifference is the source of misery for one who delights in his selfishness. There is also the idea that any rebellion against the Law of love has a consequence on those who ignore their fellow human beings.

This text allows us to understand the drama that is taking place in the Gospel between Lazarus, the poor, and the rich man. First of all, the Gospel talks about the existence of the rich man and the poor Lazarus who was lying at his door in hope of having something to eat, but without any luck. Then, it talks about the death of both men and their different destiny in the other world.

After that, the Gospel describes the reactions of the rich man who was asking for help and, eventually, asked Abraham to send back Lazarus to warn his brothers so that they avoid having the same lot like him. It also gives the answer of Abraham who affirms the impossibility of changing human destiny once someone is in the other world.

The Gospel ends up with the statement of Abraham about the importance of listening to Moses and the Prophet when people are still on earth.

What do we learn from today's readings? Today I want to talk about the drama of indifference. What do I mean by that? Let me explain. In fact, we have been told that we have to work hard in order to succeed and be responsible for the outcome of our life. Human experience has shown over the years and through generations of people of that to be true. We have also been told that if we do nothing for our life, nobody will do it for us. That also is true.

However, people can be so absorbed with their own business and concerns that they become indifferent to others. Moreover, they can be so focused on pursuing their own interest that they become not only selfish, but also insensitive to the presence of unfortunate situations and people around them. Such indifference and insensitivity are at the basis of the drama that is taking place in the Gospel.

In fact, the Gospel does not say that the rich man was a mean person or someone who mistreated Lazarus. On the contrary, he was a good person who never had problems with anybody, neither was he responsible for the poverty 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 that is true, then, why is he now in trouble? For Jesus, indeed, 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 when he was lying at his door in pain and hunger. He stayed completely indifferent to 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. But, when we read the Gospel like this of today, 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. Moreover, it is a possibility of losing eternal life when we do not act according to the law of the love of God and of our neighbor.

Does God choose the 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 so, am I pushing us to live in fear or to feel guilty for things we should have done, but we did not? Not at all; my point is that we come to take seriously our commitment as Christians while we are still alive and repent of our sins.

Why? Because it seems clear that the distance between Lazarus in heaven and the rich man in the netherworld is the result of a hole that he dug himself when he was still alive. In other words, 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.

If all that is true, then, it means that solidarity and openness of heart to the needy are some of the important criteria that determine life after death and we should practice it.

It also means that we are all called to the conversion of heart especially with regard to the sin of omission. That is why the words of Abraham to the rich man should always resonate in the heart of each one of us: "If your brothers do not listen to Moses and the prophets, even if someone should rise from the dead, they will not listen".

Finally, it means that the foundation of our faith is the word of God and not the apparitions of phantoms. 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 to, that is, Jesus Christ.

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

Amos 6: 1a, 4-7; 1 Tim 6: 11-16; Luke 16: 19-31



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