

Twenty Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time C2022

Last Sunday, we heard the prophet Amos denouncing those who buy the poor and the needy with their money, and at cheap cost. Today the prophet Amos comes again with another set of accusation.

This time he denounces those who do not care for the fate of Israel. While the country is going down and collapsing everywhere, they are indifferent, selfish and just enjoying themselves. They delight in luxury and complacency as though there was no problem at all in the country. As it was last Sunday, God will not leave them without punishment: they will be deported and go into exile like anybody else.

That attitude of indifference constitutes the drama that takes place in today's Gospel between the rich man and the poor Lazarus. For sure, 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. That Lazarus has been poor can never be imputed to him or his fault.

A question that comes here is this: If it is true that the rich man did not do anything wrong against Lazarus, why is he in trouble now at the end of his life? Why to deprive him of eternal salvation while he did not do any wrong? 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.

In 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; 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 pretend that hell does not exist, that it is an invention of Catholic Church done in order to keep people in fear. But, when we read the Gospel of today, we realize that it does exist.

What is it, then? 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. It is the loss of our eternal life when we do not act according to the law of the love of God and of our neighbor, thus, when we do not do the will of God in our lives.

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 in the after death.

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 you 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 other words, what we get after death depends on the way we live here on earth.

Let me summarize all that I said in a couple of points: First, solidarity and relationship are decisive criteria for our life after death. Those who are well off should not claim that they do not know about poverty and misery in their neighborhood. The rich man who lived in selfishness, surrounded by his goods and without involvement with the poor, is surprised after death that he is condemned for something he did not do.

Second, never put off for tomorrow what you can do today, especially when it is about the conversion of heart or getting rid of your sins. The rich man learned it the hard way: "If your brothers do not listen to Moses and the prophets, even if someone should rise from the dead, they will not listen", Abraham told the rich man. Remember that human stubbornness before God is a source of drama, as the misfortune of the rich is the result of the hardness of his heart and his ears.

Third, the foundation of our faith is the word of God and not the apparitions of phantoms. When we fail to listen to the scriptures and put them into practice, we prepare our eternal ruin. 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.

As I was finishing this homily I received some spiritual words of wisdom from a dear friend of mine. I want to share them with you as a conclusion to the homily of today: "Sometimes we think we are good people and it is enough, but we must be willing to learn daily from his word in the Bible, to pray, to confess, to repent and to forgive, and let him be the judge on how we are good". God bless you!

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



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