

XXVI SUNDAY SEPT 26, 2010: AMOS 6:1, 4-7; TIM. 6:11-16; LK 16: 19-31

The main theme of this Sunday is the warning that the selfish and extravagant use of God's blessings, like wealth, without sharing them with the poor and the needy, is a serious sin. Today's readings stress the truth that wealth without active mercy for the poor is great wickedness. Amos, in the first reading, issues a powerful warning to those who seek wealth at the expense of the poor and who all spend their time and their money on themselves. The angry prophet prophesies that those rich and unsympathetic people in the Southern kingdom of Judah will be punished by God with exile because they haven't cared for their poor and suffering brothers in the North. In today's gospel, Jesus repeats the warning against the selfish use of God's blessings, pointing to the destiny of the rich man who neglected his duty to show mercy to poor Lazarus. The rich man's punishment was not for having riches, but for neglecting the Scriptures and what they taught.

Jesus told this parable to condemn the Pharisees for their love of money and lack of mercy for the poor. He also used the parable to correct three Jewish misconceptions believed by the Sadducees: 1) Material prosperity in this life is God's reward for moral uprightness, while poverty and illness are God's punishment for sins. Hence, there is no need to help the poor and the sick, for they have been cursed by God. 2) Since wealth is a sign of God's blessing, the best way of thanking God for it is to enjoy it by leading a life of luxury and self-indulgence in dress, eating and drinking, of course, after giving God His tithe. 3) The parable also addressed the false doctrine of the Sadducees denying the survival of the soul after death, and, so, the consequent retribution in the next life that we will receive for our evil deeds and neglects in this life. Jesus challenges these misconceptions through the parable and condemns the rich who ignore the poor they encounter. The parable also offers an invitation to each one of us to be conscious of the sufferings of those around us and to share our blessings generously.

God has blessed each one of us with wealth or health or special talents or social power or political influence or a combination of many blessings. The parable invites us to share with others in various ways what we have been given, instead of using everything exclusively for selfish gains.

Accordingly another scholar, the "Lazarus" of the 20th and 21st centuries also includes our unborn brothers and sisters who are brutally executed in their mother's wombs. Their cries for a chance to live are rejected 4400 times a day in our country. Each one aborted is a person who has been torn apart and thrown away by that abortion. The rich man was condemned for not treating Lazarus as his brother. We also will be condemned for our selfishness if we do not treat the preborn as our brother and sister. "Who am I to interfere with a woman's choice to abort?" I am a brother, a sister of that

child in the womb! I am a human being who has enough decency to stand up and say "NO!" when I see another human being about to be killed. I am a person gifted with enough wisdom to realize that injustice to one human being is injustice to every human being, and that my own life is only as safe as the life of the preborn child. Finally, I am a follower of the One who said, "Whatsoever you do to the least of my brothers, you do to me."

Let me conclude with a prayer of Mother Teresa, *"Jesus, give me your heart of love toward the least of your brothers and sisters. Show me how to hold them up to you in prayer- and how to reach out to them with your love."*