

The First Sunday after Trinity / Second Sunday after Pentecost, 2020 A. ✠ D.

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

The account recorded by St. Luke that you just heard read was spoken two thousand years ago. It is an account, a factual account. It is not a parable. The Lord's Words before and after the account of the rich man and Lazarus are indicative statements of fact. There was a rich man. There was a beggar named Lazarus. It profits us much to consider the account of their lives, and their eternal condition, that the Lord speaks.

The name Lazarus means "whom God helps" in Hebrew. The world and the televangelist would name the rich man Lazarus, for he seemed to be helped much more by God than the beggar. He was dressed in expensive clothes and ate well. The beggar lay at his gate covered with sores, his begging for mere crumbs ignored.

And as if that suffering weren't enough, his ceremonial uncleanness and physical discomfort were compounded by dogs licking his sores. It is a horrible picture. It certainly seems like it was not Lazarus whom God helped.

But see not with fleshly eyes, rather see with the eyes of faith. The Kingdom of God is not like this fallen world. The riches of the Kingdom of God do not rust or fade, as did the vestments and material possessions of that rich man.

While the name Lazarus is rich in meaning, it is important that the rich man isn't named in the account given by the Lord. Lazarus' name was written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world. Not so the rich man. He is nameless for eternity.

The beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The Lord is merciful. He brought Lazarus' earthly suffering to an end. The brief bitter hour of Lazarus' earthly life gave way to eternity in bliss and felicity. He was ushered into heaven by holy angels. He is most certainly "whom God helps". It is Lazarus that is truly rich. He begs no more. He hungers no more. The treasures he enjoys far surpass anything the rich man ever had.

The terse nature of the Lord's account of the rich man's death is striking when compared to that of Lazarus. Lazarus died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man "died and was buried." No holy angels. No bearing up in holy hands. No bright celestial home.

But it gets worse. The Lord continues about the rich man: "being in torment in Hades..." The rich man received the eternal reward every sinner merits. It is a horrible sentence. For the torment never ends. There the worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.

The rich man suffered the torment of Hades. But more, for eternity he knows that there is a heaven, but he can never enter it. There is a great chasm fixed. No one can cross over. Like Adam after being cast out of Eden, he saw the entrance, he knew what was inside, but he could never go in. The cherubim and flaming sword prevented it. So too the rich man. The great chasm prevents it. But the flames he suffered weren't on a sword. They were on him.

It is an awful sentence, and yet a just sentence. And while he called out for help from Father Abraham, Abraham wasn't his father. Abraham is the father of the faithful. So like Lazarus on earth, so the rich man in Hades: no help, no comfort, no mercy, no deliverance will ever be his. And every sin that you have committed has earned you a place with the

rich man.

The rich man's transgression was not being rich. Abraham was among the richest men in the Old Testament. The rich man's transgression was making the riches his god. So it is that the Apostle writes "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love."

The cold heart the rich man turned to poor Lazarus was a symptom, a sign. It was the outward manifestation of a loveless heart, a heart of unbelief. Love is of God. The rich man could not show love to Lazarus, for he did not know God. He is simply called the rich man because his wealth defined him.

His clothes and material belongings and his pride were his god. And that is a loveless god, an unforgiving god, a selfish god, a gluttonous god. So the nameless man remains in poverty in Hades, in torment, now and forever.

If we take the Word of the Lord seriously, the account of Lazarus and the rich man should cause each of us to consider ourselves. And we ought to do it in the light of the Apostolic Word: "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." Two thousand years ago the Lord said "the poor you will always have with you." And so it is today. The street corners are dotted with beggars.

But just as being rich doesn't condemn one to Hades, so being poor doesn't open heaven's gates. The Lord doesn't teach "Blessed are the poor." He teaches "Blessed are the poor in spirit." It is quite possible to be poor in material things and be haughty of spirit, self-absorbed, egocentric, loveless.

And it is quite possible to be richly blessed in material things, and still to be haughty of spirit, self-absorbed, egocentric, and loveless. So look to yourself, O Fallen Man. What in your life has come between you and God? What prevents you from the daily study of His Word? What hinders your prayers? To whom have you failed to show love? Who have you stepped over at your gate? Whose cries for only crumbs, be they material or emotional, have found a deaf ear in you?

To whom have you denied compassion? Has your heart only and always been filled with mercy and love for those around you, even those who are a little more difficult to love? Do the Words of our Lord "he died and was buried, and in torment in Hades" have no effect on your heart?

Hear then, what God has done for you, even while you were still in your sins: "In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

That Propitiation was a bloody, cruciform suffering and death. God the Son suffered separation from God the Father, which is to know the pangs of Hades. He who had the heavenly luminaries as His footstool humbled Himself to become poor and lowly.

The Sinless One who is Love Incarnate suffered as the most loveless idolater to ever have lived. The Incarnate God Who Helps was denied help. He went the way of the rich man. He

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died and was buried.

He endured it for you. He endured the torment that you be spared. He paid the debt you incurred by your sins. He settled your account with God. Believing that Christ died for you, the benefits of His death and resurrection are applied to you.

Believing the Gospel, in baptismal faith worked by the Holy Spirit, you love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. You love Him because He first loved you. And knowing personally the great love God has for you in Christ, you respond by showing that love to others. That's what faith does. You love your neighbor as yourself, for you bask in the superabundant love of Christ.

Be you rich or poor, in Christ it is you who are "whom God helps." For you have Moses and the Prophets. Faith listens to them. And One has come to you from the dead, the risen and ascended Christ, who banquets you this day not on crumbs, but on His very Body and Blood.

He bids you partake of His New Testament, the Testament in His Blood, the Testament of Love, and His Words are written in your mind and in your heart, for the Spirit of Love fills you.

And for you, for you baptized into Christ, for you who believe in Christ, for you who eat and drink Christ in faith, for you Abraham's bosom awaits. You are a true child of Abraham, for Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness, and you believe God, and it is credited to you as righteousness.

You have a life that cannot be taken away, for Christ breached the chasm no other man could. It is you who are truly rich. It is you who are "whom God helps." For you the eternal bliss and joy and peace and comfort and riches of heaven await.

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