

YOU IN YOUR LIFETIME RECEIVED YOUR GOOD THINGS, AND LAZARUS IN LIKE MANNER BAD THINGS; BUT NOW HE IS COMFORTED HERE, AND YOU ARE IN ANGUISH – Biblical commentary by F. Alberto Maggi OSM

Lk 16.19-31

At that time Jesus said to the Pharisees, "There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side.

The rich man also died and was buried, and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.' But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.'

And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house- for I have five brothers- so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.' But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' And he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'"

Jesus said it in a clear and radical manner. It is easier for a camel to enter through the eye of a needle than a rich man to enter into heaven, in the kingdom of God. Why is this? In the kingdom of God there is a place for the lords but not for the rich. What is the difference? The rich man is he who has kept all for himself, the lord is he who has generously shared with the others. Therefore Jesus absolutely excludes the rich. The rich, in Luke's gospel, are considered terminally ill with egoism for which there is no hope. Let's hear this parable in chapter 16, 19, the parable of Lazarus and the rich man, that Jesus addresses to the Pharisees. Those Pharisees that when Jesus had said "that you cannot serve God and wealth" mocked and sneered at him.

Jesus says: "There was a rich man.." It's the third time that a rich man appears in this gospel and it is always negative. And here is the amazing description with which the evangelist describes the rich man. "..who was clothed in purple and fine linen" Today it would be said "dressed in designer clothes," ".. who

feasted sumptuously every day." He went to the best restaurants. In this verse there is the psychological description of an extraordinarily important rich man. But 'poor inwardly, so he needs to show wealth outwardly, that's why he dresses in designer clothes from head to foot. How hungry he is. Every day he gives lavish banquets, he has inside an insatiable hunger, which he believes is calmed by gobbling food. He does not understand this internal hunger is satisfied by giving to others.

So, an internal poverty which corresponds to an external luxury. Then there is the poor man, "*..named Lazarus,*" He is the only person in the parable that has a name. Lazarus means "God helps." "*..at his gate ... covered with sores,*" The fact that he was covered in sores, according to the mentality of that time, meant that he was chastised by God, therefore a sinner who has been punished, one that had sort his own misfortune .

"..who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came..". Dogs were considered impure animals, "*.. and licked his sores.*" Impure animals are the only ones that go near a person considered to be impure. In this description it does not speak of malice on behalf of the rich man towards Lazarus, they live in two different worlds, two separate worlds. The rich man, as we shall see, is reprimanded and condemned not because he behaved badly towards the poor Lazarus, but simply because he ignored him.

Physically they were near (he sat at his gate), but they were in two different worlds, worlds apart

"The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side." Jesus is not talking to his disciples, but to the Pharisees, and uses the theological categories of the Pharisees. In the Pharisaic world a book apocryphal was in vogue, called the Book of Enoch, in which the after death was represented as an enormous cave, called ""The bosom of Abraham", where, in the deepest part, therefore the darkest there were the people that had behaved badly, the higher part, therefore nearer the light, the people that had behaved well. So, the poor man died and was taken to be near Abraham, that is the lighter part.

He who was considered to be in punishment in fact was presented as one blessed

"The rich man also died and was buried, and in Hades,..." Finally with the new translation of the Bible in 2008 an error has been corrected, present in previous editions, in which the Greek word "ade" was translated with "hell". It is not hell, but the underworld, the lower part of the earth,

"..being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side." Now finally, in the moment of need, the rich man sees the one he has ignored all his life, Lazarus.

"And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me,....'" The rich are always the same, everything is theirs. They never think to give, but they expect. And here the imperative is used "send" Now that he has seen Lazarus it is only to use him for his own purposes.

"..send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame." Now finally he has seen Lazarus, but he sees him only for his own needs. He does not beg, he demands. He does not ask, he commands, which is the typical attitude of the rich.

"But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things;" you have not shared your wealth with Lazarus. "*..but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed,*" that is, the

same different world, the same chasm that was on earth between the rich, who lived at a level where the poor man was not noticed, there is now after death. *"..in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us."*

"And he said, 'Then I beg you, father,... " note... the rich, terminally ill with egoism Now that he is in need he does not think of the people, but only of himself and possibly his family clan ... *"I beg you, father to send him to my father's house—for I have five brothers. "* He is interested only in his own family, he does not say *" send him into the country."* ..so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment."

"But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them." Moses and the prophets had written in favour of the poor. Moses says his wish is that in his people no one is in need. And the prophets were angry against the rich, feeding off the goods of the poor

" And he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent." And here is Jesus' final sentence to the Pharisees. *"He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets,'"* the Pharisees who have always been inspired by Moses and the prophets, Jesus exclaims that they do not really listen to them, *".. neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead."*

Why does Jesus say this, that neither at the rising of the dead will they be persuaded ? Because they are so incapable of sharing their bread with the hungry, they are never going to believe in the rising, in the risen Christ, that is recognizable, as in the episode of Emmaus in this Gospel, only by the breaking of the bread. Only those who are generous in life can then make the experience of the risen Christ in his life.