

**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 Father Alberto Maggi OSM**

**Luke 16,19-31**

*“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<sup>1</sup> 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 declared it clearly and radically. It is easier for a camel to enter the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven, that is, into the kingdom of God. Why is this? In the kingdom of God there is room for lords but not for the rich. What is the difference? The rich is he who has and holds for himself, the lord is he who gives and shares generously with others. So Jesus strictly excludes the rich. The rich, in Luke's Gospel, are considered terminally sick of selfishness for which there is no hope.

Let's hear this parable in Luke chapter 16, from 19, about Lazarus and the rich man that Jesus addresses to the Pharisees. Those Pharisees who when Jesus said "one cannot serve God and wealth" mocked and sneered behind his back.

Jesus says: “ *There was a rich man...* ” It is the third time that a rich man appears in this gospel and the image is always negative. And here is the fantastic brushstroke with which the evangelist describes the rich man. “*...who was clothed in purple and fine linen ...* ” Today one would say wore fashion clothes “*... and who feasted sumptuously every day.* ” Went to the well known restaurants In this single verse there is a psychological description of the rich of extraordinary importance. He is poor inwardly, so he needs to show his wealth outwardly, which is why he dresses fashionably from head to toe. And how hungry he is! Every day he gives himself lavish banquets, he has an insatiable inner hunger inside, which he thinks of calming down by gulping down food. He does not understand that instead this inner hunger is satisfied by giving to others.

. So, an inner poverty corresponding to external luxury. Then there is a poor man, “ *at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus...* ” He is the only person in the parable with a name. Lazarus means “God helps” “*..covered with sores...* ” The fact that he is covered with sores, according to

the mentality of the time, means that he was chastised by God, so he is a sinner who was punished, one who went in search of his misfortune “*...who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs...*” Dogs were considered impure animals “*...came and licked his sores.*” The impure animals are the only ones that come close to someone considered impure. In this description there is no mention of wickedness on the part of the rich man against 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 poor Lazarus, but simply because he ignored him.

They were next to each other physically, but living in two worlds completely different, miles apart “*The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side.*” Jesus is not addressing this teaching to his disciples, but to the Pharisees, and uses theological categories proper to the Pharisees. In the Pharisaic world an apocryphal book was in vogue, called the book of Enoch, in which life after death is represented as a huge cave, called precisely “the breast of Abraham”, where, in the deepest and darkest part, were the people who had behaved badly, in the highest part, therefore closest to the light, the people who had behaved well. Well the poor man dies and is carried next to Abraham, that is to say in the most luminous part.

He who was considered a punished person is presented as a blessed one.

“*The rich man also died and was buried, and in Hades...*” Finally, with the new translation of the CEI Bible of 2008, the error, present in previous editions, which translated the Greek word “*ade*” with “hell” or “Hades” was corrected. It is not a question of hell, but of the underworld, that is, 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 times of need, the rich man realizes what he had ignored throughout his life, Lazarus. He who was considered a punished person is presented as a blessed.

“*And he called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me...*” The rich are always the same, everything is due to them. They never think of giving, but pretend. And here the imperative is used “send!” Command! Now that he has noticed 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 he has finally noticed Lazarus, but sees him only for his need. 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; ...’*” meaning that you did not divide your good things 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, there is the same abyss that was on the earth among the rich man, who lived on such a level that he did not notice the poor man, there is now also 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 terminal illness of egoism, now that he is in need he does not think of the people, but only himself and eventually his own family clan “*... to send him to my father's house— for I have five brothers—*” He is interested only for his own family, he does not say go tell the whole country! “*... so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.*”

“*He said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, ...’*” Moses and the prophets wrote in favour of the poor. In Moses we read that the will is that in his people no one is in need. And the prophets thundered against the rich, who feed on 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 the final sentence for the Pharisees : “ *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.’*”

Why does Jesus say this, that not even the resurrection of the dead will be persuaded? Because those who are incapable of sharing their bread with the hungry, will never be able to believe in the risen Christ, who is recognizable, as in this Gospel, in the episode of Emmaus, only with breaking the bread. Only those who are generous in life can then make the experience of the risen Christ in his existence.