

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.'"

For the third and last time the expression "rich man" appears in Luke's Gospel. This expression is always negative. It has already appeared once as a foolish, stupid, rich, greedy man demolishing the barns to build others and the Lord said to him "You fool, this very night you must surrender your life;.... you have made your money, who will get it now?"

The last time we have seen the same expression, the rich man praises the dishonest manager and Jesus denounces the fact that wealth is always dishonest. The dishonest are so perverse in their system of wealth and values, that they admire the dishonest. And this third time, it is the parable known by all as the parable of the rich man and poor Lazarus.

In Luke's Gospel Chapter 16,19 et seq. The Evangelist says "« There was a rich man»", and with a clever brushstroke paints a picture, "«.. who was clothed in purple and fine linen.. »". Today we

would say that he dressed in designer clothes from head to foot; an inner poverty needs an expensive exterior to express itself.

“«.....*who feasted sumptuously every day.* »”, therefore an insatiable hunger; it is the inner hunger that needs to be soothed by swallowing food. This is the only description of the rich man given by Luke, that’s not said – as once was thought – this rich man is evil, bad, nothing of this. He is a rich man and, according to the Jewish Biblical tradition, was blessed by God because God rewarded the good with riches and the bad with poverty.

“«*..a poor man named Lazarus*»”, it is the only time that a personage in the parables has a name, and this name means ‘ God helps ’, “«*..he was at his gate covered with sores,* »” The sores were considered a punishment sent by God, according to the second Book of Deuteronomy, chapter 28. So man is guilty of his misery and of his sores.

“«*.. who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came..*»”, those impure animals, the beings considered the most impure “«*...and licked his sores.*»” Therefore it is the impure that live amongst the impure. Well, surprise, says Jesus “«*The poor man died and was carried by the angels..* »”.

The man that had as his only companions on earth impure dogs, was carried by the angels, those considered the purest of beings, those next to God. “«*..to Abraham's side.*»” To understand well this parable of Jesus, note that it was told to the Pharisees that had mocked Jesus for saying that it is impossible to serve God and money, and precisely because it is addressed to the Pharisees, Jesus speaks to them with the pharisaic categories of the reward and the punishment to be received in the hereafter.

And he does it using a well known book of that time, the Book of Enoch, where the kingdom of the dead was considered a great abyss, where the most luminous place was the bosom of Abraham, the darkest place was where the evil went.

“«*The rich man also died and was buried, and in Hades,..* »”, the word ‘Hades’ from the Greek word ‘ade’ meaning ‘ the reign of the dead, “«*..being in torment, he lifted up his eyes..*»”, at last he sees Lazarus. The rich man of this parable does not get condemned for treating the poor man badly, to have abused him, but he was simply not aware of his existence.

Only now, when in need, does he finally become aware of him. But the rich man does not change, the wealthy are motivated by a perversion that is impossible to eradicate from their existence. In fact he does not ask, but still commands, “«*'Father Abraham, have mercy on me..*»”, have mercy on me and orders “«*..send Lazarus*»”, he, the rich man thinks all is due to him. He is served by people, he has never served.

And Abraham replied, according to the pharisaic theology, with the fact of the reward and of punishment, “«*..remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things;* »” and so as they lived in two different worlds on earth where they did not meet – I repeat the rich man ignored the existence of the poor man – now they are in two worlds completely apart.

So here is the selfishness of the rich man, a selfishness not easily eradicated, that goes on right to the end. He says, “«*Then I beg you, father, to send Lazarus...*»” he uses Lazarus, “« *....to my*

father's house- for I have five brothers-»". He is interested only in his family, he does not say "send him to the people, send him to warn them what happens if they accumulate money, and does not think of others".

No, the rich man is an incurable egoist, thinking only of himself and all that is due to him. Then sends him only to his brothers, to his family, he is not interested in the others.

And here's Abraham's reply "*«They have Moses and the Prophets; »*" those who have legislated in favour of the poor, Moses said "the word of the Lord is that no one will be in need " , the prophets have shouted often against the wealthy, "*«... let them hear them.»*"

The rich man replies: "*«No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent. »*" And here is the important and dramatic sentence of Jesus, "*«Abraham replies: 'If they do not hear Moses ..»*", the parable is addressed to the Pharisees, those that use Moses' laws and doctrine as a shield only to cover their own interests.

These people are very pious, very devout, the zealous guardians of the tradition and the faith, when convenient, they are the first to ignore the law of which they are defenders. "*«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? Because how many have not been able to share the bread with the hungry, they will never believe in the risen Christ, which is recognized only – as Luke writes in the episode of Emmaus - in the breaking of bread. So it's a very stern warning against the cancer of wealth.

A person who becomes affected with this disease is incurable and cannot be cured even in the afterlife.