

Homily For the 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year C

St Peter's 5:00pm Sat/8:00am Masses - September 24/25, 2022

Amos 6:1,4-7 "The revelry of those who lie in ease shall pass away."

Psalm 146: 3-6, 12-17 "It is the Lord who executes justice for the oppressed."

1 Timothy 6:11-16 "Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called."

Luke 16: 19-31 "Remember that during your lifetime, you received good things and Lazarus evil things."

Good and Evil Things

Introduction

Suppose I were to ask you, "Do you want to live forever?" Some might say no, but most would say yes. I read somewhere that "Many who want to be immortal don't even know what to do on a snowy Sunday afternoon." Typically, those who are having a great time in this life don't want it to end. Those who are suffering greatly probably think that, if it is just a lot more of this then, "Thanks, but No Thanks." Amongst those who are well off, there is the hope that heaven will be more of the same. Amongst those who have little or nothing, there is the hope that life in eternity will bring beauty and abundance that does not exist here.

We say that God has put the desire for eternity in our hearts. If we think about it enough, we will realize that there is something wrong with the whole idea that life ends, even if one has lived a long time. Bishop Cooney's 94 year mother said that it felt like it had only lasted the snap of the fingers, even after so long.

Other things tell us the same. One is that there is nothing about what we can experience in this life that totally satisfies. We always want more. We do our best to fill that desire with what is around us, but somehow it is never enough. But God is eternal. The destiny to which God calls us goes beyond what the world can offer. There is something about eternity that time and space and possessions cannot satisfy. As St. Augustine famously puts it. We are made for you, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you. So, the human heart has this aching for eternal life.

The Christian faith tells us that, with the birth of Jesus Christ, God has entered into our lives, into the created order itself, to lift us out of the desire to seek eternal satisfaction in things that are not eternal. We should all be able to explain that his resurrection overcame his death, to show us that there is a resurrected life beyond this life. To be with God, which is the promise of heaven, is to be with the one who made everything good that we love about this life.

Amos, from 800 years before Jesus, the psalmist from even before that, St. Paul from 30 years after Jesus, and Jesus himself, all testify in their own way, to the reality that our lives here are preparing us for the lives to come.

Psalm

The one who wrote the inspired psalms tells us that God executes justice. Justice is giving to someone what he or she is owed. It may sound contrary to what you hear every day but, in this life, those who have more than enough owe those who do not have enough, some of that wealth.

In God's plan there is to be no one who suffers. There will always be those who have more and those who have less, so God has not implemented a political system where everyone is the same and everyone has the same. Far from it. The Scriptures are full of examples of the recognition that there are going to be some of have more and some who have less. What is unique in Christianity, and what converted the entire Roman Empire, and later the world, to Christ, is that the Christians were confident that there was something more attractive and amazing in eternity than there could ever hope to be in this life. Because of this thinking, we say that everything belongs to God and therefore must be used in a godly way.

Amos

Amos was giving testimony in a time of affluence that the rules of justice were not being followed in the treatment even between Israelites. There was a present luxury that would end in exile from their own kingdom when Assyria conquered them and took everything they had away.

They drink wine from bowls and anoint themselves with the best oils. Along with luxury came insensitivity to the poor right in their own midst. Anointing meant that someone was being made special, so they were anointing themselves, especially the leaders, putting themselves above others.

1 Timothy

Thirty years after Jesus, St. Paul expands on what the future holds for those who live according to God's commands. He says, "take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and to which you committed yourself when you were baptized. This destiny would not be for those who say, as some do in our time, "I'm basically a good person so I'm sure God will welcome me." This is for those who have earnestly tried to become like the one we worship. "But you, man of God, pursue righteousness, devotion, faith, love, patience, and gentleness." These descriptive words of characteristics of Jesus which we are to emulate.

Luke

With all that said, we come to the story Jesus tells about a rich man and a poor man. In this life, the rich man is so comfortable that he doesn't even notice the poor man begging at his gate. Lazarus is lying at the gate, not sitting. He is too weak and malnourished to even sit up. The dogs notice him and so even they are more kind than the rich man. All of his human senses AND his spiritual senses are asleep, dulled by his pursuit of riches and pleasure.

They both die, as all must. The rich man gets a burial. The poor Lazarus doesn't even get the dignity of a burial. But, in the eternal life, he is ushered to a place of happiness and satisfaction by angels. The rich man has already indulged himself in every earthly pleasure, without concern for the poor, and so is in a place of poverty and torment.

This place after death is often seen as heaven and hell. Others say it is purgatory, or even simply Hades, the place of the dead where the just wait for Jesus Christ to redeem them at the time of his resurrection.

Before death, the rich man could not see Lazarus. Now that he is suffering, he is able to see Lazarus with Abraham. His own suffering give him a kind of clarity. Send Lazarus to me, he says. All of a sudden he knows his name. Now he wants the redeemed poor man to serve him in eternity. He is asking Lazarus for something he was unwilling to give. So his arrogance, which he cultivated while on earth, is still with him. But Jesus does not name the rich man. Before he had a name and status. Now he is unknown.

Love of money deadens the awareness of those who could be helped by our generosity. Love of money leads only to the desire for more money and blindness to those in need of a little.

They both descend from Abraham, having equal dignity and status before God. There is not supposed to be any slavery or poverty for the descendents of Abraham. So the fact that there is disparity is already against God's plan. That is still true today. Poverty means that there is injustice, which contradicts every aspect of God's law and God's plan for our happiness.

Call To Conversion

This story shows that, immediately after death, the soul is judged by God for all its acts and is rewarded or punished. This story also teaches the innate dignity of every human person. Respect for this dignity implies that we must help those who are experiencing any material or spiritual need.

Jesus doesn't tell a parable so that his listeners can condemn a bad person. He tells a story like this so that his listeners will see themselves in it. So, the same is true for you and I. Will we see the riches we have that need to be shared.

"... In what I have done and in what I have failed to do ..." The rich man in Jesus' parable could use to have reflected on our prayer of confession at mass because of what he failed to do. Is this a commentary on being rich? No. Jesus consistently reminds that the problem is for those who love money, because you cannot love God and money. It will choke out that good love.

Once you have your basic needs met, everything else belongs to the poor. What are we called to see? That our money, our talents, our treasures, everything we have and are, as gifts from God, so that we will use them for the building up of the Church and the kingdom.

The readings are warning of what can rob us of the riches of heaven. The more we have physical goods, the less we pursue spiritual goods. Why is that? There is a sense of security and satisfaction that dulls our desire for the higher goods. Children don't believe that having a cookie before supper will make them less interested in supper. I still fall victim to that temptation at times.

Jesus rises from the dead so that we will repent of our sins and turn to him and be saved from the consequence of the rich man. We need to take these readings to heart because, compared to much of the world, we have wealth.

Today we are invited, challenged, called, to do maybe even one thing that recognizes our wealth and the demand to share it. Today, let us enter on the path that our saviour walked, maybe tentatively at first, but with the desire to live the charity that is the nature of our saviour, who held nothing back so that we might experience the joy of eternity with God. There will be nothing boring about that.

Key Passages

Entrance Antiphon: *O Lord, we have sinned against you and not obeyed your commandments. But give glory to your name and deal with us according to the bounty of your mercy.*

Collect: *O God, who manifest your almighty power above all by pardoning and showing mercy, bestow your grace abundantly upon us.*

Amos: *Thus says the Lord, the God of Hosts: Alas for those who are at ease in Zion and for those who feel secure. Alas for those who lounge on their couches and eat lambs from the flock, who drink wine from bowls and anoint themselves with the finest oils but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph! Therefore they shall be the first to go into exile, and the revelry of those who lie in ease shall pass away.*

Psalms: *It is the Lord who keeps faith forever, who executes justice for the oppressed, who gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets the prisoners free. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down. The Lord upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.*

1 Timothy: *As for you, man of God, pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called and for which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. In the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession. I charge you to keep the commandment until the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ, which he will bring about at the right time. He is the blessed King of kings and Lord of hosts.*

Luke: *Jesus told this parable to those among the Pharisees who loved money: "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. At his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table. The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham, far away with Lazarus by his side. He called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in agony in these flames.' But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your lifetime you received good things and Lazarus evil things. But now he is comforted here and you are in agony. Besides, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.' The man who had been rich said, 'Then, father, I beg you to send Lazarus to my father's house that he may warn my five brothers, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.'" Abraham replied, "They have Moses and the prophets. They should listen to them." He said, "No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead they will repent." Abraham said to him, "If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead."*