

Homily for September 29, 2019
26th Sunday of Ordinary Time
Noticing Lazarus

You might not be familiar with the name David Greenwald but may be with his shows. He was the lead screen writer and a co-producer of such hit series as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Angel* and *Grimm*. *Buffy and Angel* aired from the mid-90s to 2004 and *Grimm* aired from 2011 to 2017.

Over the past couple of years Mr. Greenwald has undergone a conversion to Catholicism. In an interview that appeared in the *Journal of the Word on Fire Institute*, (the Ministry established by Bishop Robert Barron), Mr. Greenwald said:

*I want there to be a sign in every classroom in America that says: “Surgeon General’s Warning: Stuff will not make you happy.” Yet we all think, “If only I had a million dollars, or ten million”. There is only one thing that can fix that and it took me a life time to learn it. (He is now in his 60s). Between Angel and Grimm, I went through a very dark night, a very bad depression. Sometimes I like to say, “Now I know there is a heaven”, but sometimes I will say, “Well I am not sure there is a heaven, but I sure know there is a hell, because I have been there”. Therefore I sort of feel heavenly now, on this earth and this time in my life.*¹

Greenwald discovered that he was living a hell on earth that awakened him to an awareness that something was very wrong with how he was passing these earthly days. Sadly the rich man in today’s Parable, sometimes known as Dives (the Latin word for “rich”), never discovered his living hell and so ended up in that eternal state once his short earthly life ended.

In the Parable, Jesus calls Hell, Hades. In the Book of Sirach there is this apt depiction of Hades.

*The way of sinners is paved with smooth stones,
but at its end is the pit of Hades.*²

What Sirach expresses here is captured by Jesus in the Parable. We could paraphrase Sirach 21:10 this way:

*“The road that sinners walk is smooth and easy to travel.
but it slopes down to the world of the dead”*

David Greenwald came to see this downward slope with clarity inspiring his conversion to Catholicism. But what about Dives?

¹ Word on Fire Institute Journal: Fall 2019, page 35-36

² [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Sir 21:9–10). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

It is worth noting that Jesus doesn't say that Dives violated the Commandments through acts of commission, that is, things he did. His problem were the sins of omission, the things he did not do, most especially ignoring Lazarus.

Jesus wants us to do the very thing Dives did not do, notice Lazarus. This is the only parable of Jesus in which a character is named. Lazarus is the Greek version of the Hebrew name Eliezer, which means, "God has helped". Jesus points out to us that when in Hades, the Rich Man, calls out to Father Abraham:

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.'³

Do you hear that the rich man asks for Lazarus by name to come and help him? This means that he knew Lazarus but had done nothing in this life to help him – in other words he was not a person God could count on to help Lazarus, but now after his death, he wants the one whose name means "God has helped", to help him.

With this in mind turn with me now to the reading from Amos. Amos was writing to the people of the Northern Tribes, who had their capital at Samaria and the Southern tribe of Judah, with its capital at Zion, also known as Jerusalem.

Woe to those who are at ease in Zion, and to those who feel secure on the mountain of Samaria, "Woe to those who lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat lambs from the flock, and calves from the midst of the stall; who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp,"⁴

Amos says that like the Rich Man, his contemporaries are preoccupied with their own comfort and entertainment. Consequently the prophet anticipates they will experience, in this life judgment for their careless ease. Amos talks about the sin of the wealthy leading to earthly punishments in this world, whereas Jesus is going to talk about the sins of the rich man leading to eternal punishment in the world to come.

Do you hear what the Lord is saying to us today? To be named Christian means we are to notice those named Lazarus.

Think about this with me. Usually the poor are not known to us by name and more often than not we (the societal we) tend to ignore them. When we see a person with his hat outstretched as we

³ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Lk 16:24). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

⁴ [*The Holy Bible*](#). (2006). (Revised Standard Version; Second Catholic Edition, Am 6:4–5). San Francisco: Ignatius Press.

wait in our car for the light to turn, the majority of people look away. When we see someone outside of Safeway or downtown, begging, what do most people do?

If I am honest I will often pretend they are not there. They are nameless and faceless to me. What about you?

But Jesus is telling us to remember that the poor have a name, it is Lazarus. And he expects us in his name, to help them. So I am trying to keep some change in the car so when that person walks by me, I roll down the window and acknowledge him and give him a looney. When seeing the person outside of Safeway I want to be more attentive and take the time to buy a sandwich and fruit for him. I know of people who buy Tim Hortons gift cards and give them to people who request assistance. These are simple steps we can take to recognize the dignity of the poor, the Lazarus' of Calgary.

But how much more we can do when joined together as a parish community. Although I could not be there, it made my heart glad to hear how St. Peter's parishioners at last Sunday's Feed the Hungry served over 500 Calgarians, 700 plates. How appreciative I am to the 75 plus Vincentians who through our St. Vincent de Paul Society contribute 5,400 (225 Days) to serving the poor of Calgary's North West.

SVDP in August undertook a new initiative as we partner with the Calgary Food Bank. We can now purchase food through them, which we estimate will save us \$17,000 annually. This will allow the saved revenue to support families in other ways, like rent and utilities. However we need drivers who can assist in picking up the food from the South East Depot and bring it back to St. Peter's.

We also have a support ministry, where after delivering a hamper to a family we request if a home visit can be made to provide further help to families by connecting them with agencies in the City. These visits can help build bridges to support services to further assist those who come to us requesting help. These visits are made by pairs of Vincentians.

St. Vincent de Paul would appreciate more drivers and visitors, and support in the other areas of their work. If you would like to find out more information and enquire about helping please go to the St. Peter's website. On the home page, there is a Quick Link Box. The top link there for the next week will take you to our St. Vincent de Paul page where you can find contact number and email address. <https://joygregor1.wixsite.com/stpetersssvp2017>.

David Greenwald didn't speak explicitly about noticing Lazarus in what I quoted at the beginning of this homily, but he did say he feels kind of heavenly now on this earth. When we take the time to notice Lazarus we are joining in a special way the work of God by lending a helping hand and so bringing heaven down to earth.