

29 Readings: no. 138, p. 739; BG, p. 409 1st Reading: Amos 6.1a, 4-7 2nd Reading: 1 Timothy 6.11-16
Gospel: Luke 16.19-31 ~

Collection: Needs of the Church in Canada ~ 26th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

The story of humankind's relationship with God, can be described in quite binary terms. We experience, either "not a care in the world" or "immediate panic". There doesn't seem much in between. However, as fast as panic is capped, "spiritual complacency" settles in and God's touch is pushed to the far reaches of our memory. How quickly we imagine we have little need for God when all is going well and according to our plans. We even believe any good fortune is our pretty much our own doing. Perhaps, we might characterize, "spiritual complacency", as that period, when seduced by the charms of this world, we put our faith-life on autopilot! Disappointment and hopelessness, friends, are never far away, once spiritual complacency takes its grip.

Well, Israel during the time of Amos is a nation quite impressed with itself. The economy is rolling along, the military is strong, politics is stable, and people have plenty of time to lie around. Amos, and in fact all the prophets, continually remind this people, a rebalancing exercise is forthcoming. The Lord, who keeps faith forever, will necessarily bring down the mighty and lift up the lowly.

The present looks comfortable, but, of course, the children of Israel, will again experience exile. This time at the hands of the Assyrians. And so, what do we learn from this?

We learn, that the trap of compliancy lulls many into apathy and a false understanding of God's kingdom. Messages from every direction, today, tell us, a people so mighty as we, could hardly have need of God, or the Church. Some would even have us believe that humankind is somehow in charge. Not true! "Spiritual compliancy", friends, is not faith, and surely invites disaster, like a sedative that prevents our awakening.

St Paul speaks to Timothy about this threat and urges him to do anything but rest on his laurels. "Run away", Paul tells him from any impulses that sprout from "spiritual complacency". Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. There's no relaxing for Paul and he urges, it be the same for Timothy and in fact, believers of all generations. "Fight the good fight and take hold of eternal life with urgency."

In today's parable, we recognize the consequences of "spiritual complacency". Humility and struggle have marked Lazarus' path to Abraham's side. But for others who have pursued wealth, possessions, glamour and power, the path has led elsewhere.

The world's things simply cannot be called upon to accomplish what is expected of them. They cannot reach into the spiritual, and if they be depended upon, will even hand us over to "spiritual complacency". Such materials are, taken from us, in only the time it takes, to exhale one breath. Spirit places very little value on our bank accounts, vehicles in the driveway, or the number of friends we enjoy on social media.

The lesson Jesus offers today encourages us towards a humility that opens a way deeper into the mystery of God. To a "sacred poverty" that orients us to God. Whereas, complacency opposes the communion of peoples, tolerates injustice, and is antihuman, it is humility and faith who hold the hands of "sacred poverty". We are reminded in Luke's beatitudes, how the fortunes of so many are completely reversed in God's paradigm. Blessed are the poor, blessed are you who are now hungry!

We hear from upon the lips of Mary, the beautiful words, “The hungry he has filled with good things and the rich, He has sent away empty.” We are the hungry, who come to Holy Eucharist to be filled with Word and Sacrament. It is destiny of both this rich man and Lazarus, they should have their conditions reversed.

In life the rich man was gowned in royal purple and ate the finest foods. But in death, he has been dropped a few notches, and begs Father Abraham. “Send Lazarus, who’s sores were once licked by the dogs, to refresh me, with the moisture, he might carry on the tip of his finger. Not even a mouthful! This rich man no longer even has the dignity of a name. He is now simply a dead rich man, begging, as Lazarus once did in life. Yes, friends the Lord does hear the cry of the poor, but, the complacent, don’t cry. They can’t imagine there’s any problem, until it’s too late.

Each of us, no doubt, recognizes some connection with the rich man of our Gospel. This rich man is every one of us who grow complacent, leaving the Gospel work to be done by others. We live out rituals, but, our hearts are frozen shut, unable to see the image and likeness of God in our brothers and sisters. We don’t see any need to animate more fully our Baptism and Eucharistic natures.

“Spiritual compliancy” reduces us into takers and hoarders, not particularly concerned with the plight of others. But that’s not the people of St Peter’s Parish who know the power of Jesus’ holy and sacred meal and come not only to remember, but to join.

And we are also Lazarus, marginalized with blisters covering our hearts! Bring these hearts to Jesus and he will bandage our wounds and teach us how to bandage each other. Brothers and sisters, when we do this with great love, we climb from out of complacency and transfigure our lives and communities into the True and Living Body of Christ.

Amen