

26th Sunday in Ordinary Time cycle C

The doorbell rings frequently at Saint Mary's, and often the person or people on the other side of the door are not on our schedule. The easiest ones to take care of simply need a sandwich, a drink, and a blessing; many of them will be back, but the sandwich will do for now. Some just need to have a confession heard; that's fine, we can do that. Sometimes, the person on the other side of the door needs a virtual overhaul of their entire life, and all we can do is point them in the right direction and send them on to people who can help. On rare occasions, the person on the other side of the door needs a visit to the hospital, and some need a visit to the police station. Many need a place to lay their head that night; many need help moving all of their belongings before the end of the week. I don't always feel like answering the door; a couple of weeks ago I felt pretty bad because I was so rude to this young family, trying to get back to Indiana, and they just laid on that doorbell three or four times, which is one of my biggest pet peeves. But I chilled out, and ended up helping them that night. Sometimes, it feels good and satisfying to assist people: at times I'm willing, at times I'm admittedly impatient, sometimes I get a little angry, especially if I find out that I'm being played or being lied to. But no matter what I'm doing, I haven't brought myself to ignoring the person on the other side of the door. I don't always feel like dealing with their crisis du jour, but if I only ignored them, I think it would haunt me: what could, perhaps, have gotten accomplished—for their good, and to my spiritual benefit?

In today's Gospel we heard the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus, told by Jesus as a warning to the Pharisees. It's a scary story, because it's not just obvious where the rich man went wrong. Jesus doesn't say explicitly in the story that the man ended up in torment strictly because he had money and wealth; we're really never told why he ended up as he did. Was it because of his possessions? Because of the sumptuous food he enjoyed? The luxurious lifestyle he had? Because, the story makes it clear that in the end, in the afterlife, the tables get turned: Lazarus ends up in eternity with all the good things he was denied in this life. Abraham replied to the rich man "my child, remember that you received what was good during your lifetime, and Lazarus likewise received what was bad; but now he is comforted here, whereas you are tormented. How can it be a matter of the rich man's possessions being evil, if the opulence he once had became Lazarus' eternal lot? There's something more here, and I think that it wasn't about what the rich man *had*, so much as what he *didn't* have. What he didn't have among all his things was compassion: notice that Lazarus never refuses to assist the rich man in the afterlife by dipping his finger in the water and cooling his tongue; Abraham doesn't report that Lazarus won't, but that he can't. He seems to be willing but unable to help; whereas the rich man, when he had the wealth, was able to help but was unwilling.

Lying at his door was a poor man named Lazarus. Just lying at the door: not a bother, not a pest, just a man who had nothing, and had nowhere else to be. He did not ask for half of the man's

riches; he did not ask to move in. He did not ask to be invited to dinner, or to be treated as one of the family or as a special guest. I think that what did the rich man in, were the scraps. Lazarus would have gladly eaten just the scraps that fell from the rich man's table, the stupid scraps that nobody was going to eat anyway, that were just going to be thrown away; the scraps that the man didn't need, didn't want, and wouldn't use. And he apparently begrudged giving Lazarus even those; because they were his, to do with as he pleased and it pleased him to waste them, apparently, rather than let them go to feed a starving man. He held on to his wealth to a degree that is simply illogical; it wasn't about his great love of his scraps: if they were of any value or desire they wouldn't be called scraps. It was about his disdain for the poor man who needed those scraps to survive. Apparently, the rich man never heeded the words of the prophet Amos: Thus says the Lord the God of hosts: Woe to the complacent in Zion! Lying upon beds of ivory, stretched comfortably on their couches, anointing themselves with the best oils; yet they are not made ill by the collapse of Joseph! Their condemnation, in the form of being forced into exile, came not because they cared so much about things which didn't merit that much care; it came because they cared so little about that which should have been a great concern for them. In this story, the point isn't the rich man's great love for his possessions, as much as how little love he had for one of his fellow human beings, allowing him to die of hunger because he, the man of means, didn't want to be bothered with the man on the other side of the door.

All of us have our Lazaruses in our lives. We know they're there, on the other side of the door, we know they're there and we have to decide what we're going to do about them. We know that they're hungry for food; do we feed them? We know that some of them are hungry for God; do we share our faith in Christ Jesus with them? Sometimes, our Lazarus may be a friend or family member who is just thirsting for peace; will we open up the door that separates us and forgive them? Sometimes, it's the acquaintance who is just longing for some human interaction; will we include them? You know, being a priest, and being a priest downtown here, yeah, I've met a few users in my day, and I've met a few who I bet would gladly move right in and take the title to my car if I'd let them. But mostly, mostly all they want are my scraps: the things I don't need, won't use, or can easily spare. Remember: sometimes it's not the riches which necessarily drag us down, it's our attitude towards those who simply want the scraps, and want us to take a few minutes to go get them for them.

In our parish, we have been blessed for many years to have an active Saint Vincent de Paul Society. I know you're used to hearing about it, used to hearing us plug it and promote it, and many of you are good about using your SVDP envelopes. And mostly what we get in those envelopes are, frankly, scraps. But when we gather all those one dollar, five dollar, twenty dollar scraps together, we—as a parish—have been able to make a huge difference in the lives of people who have immediate, pressing needs. We're not equipped nor designed to take on people's lives and turn them around; but we help people get through a storm, or get over a hump. Next

weekend, we'll have the Saint Vincent de Paul truck parked in our parking lot, and I'm asking all of you to take a few moments this week to look around your homes, and to gather up some of the scraps: not junk, not garbage, just that which we don't really need or don't really want anymore. Things like clothes that don't even fit—you know, because you've lost some weight and it ain't coming back. Or like me, because you've gained some and you suspect it ain't going anywhere anytime soon. I've got my scraps gathered together: some clothes that I just never wear, some odds and ends stuff that I bought on impulse and never did, in three years, get around to taking out of their packages; and a few new things I bought that I know people in need can use. I invite you to do the same, and bring them next weekend; the Saint Vincent de Paul Society has given us a list which can be found in this weekend's bulletin of things they can take or which they can't take. And I want you to remember that, even though I live upstairs in the rectory, they're not at my door: they're at OUR door, the door of OUR parish. They're here not because Fr. Doug Dietrich lives here and they've heard he'll give out a frozen peanut butter and jelly sandwich sometimes; they're here because they see this church, and they know what we believe, and how we live our faith, and that we, as a people of God, do not ignore the man on the other side of the door. Sometimes it's not in our power to help; but sometimes it is, and when it is, that may be our salvation, we who have been blessed with so much. Remember the regrets in the story Jesus told. Lazarus regretted that he couldn't help the rich man on the other side of a great chasm escape his torments; the rich man regretted that he chose not to help the poor man on the other side of the door escape his.

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