

Homily of Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time Year C, 2022

Amos 6:1a, 4-7; Psalm 146:7-10; 1 Timothy 6:11-16; Luke 16:19-31

About 750 B.C., Amos denounced the rich and the leaders in Israel who in their extravagant life of luxury oppressed and neglected the suffering poor: “Those who lie on beds of ivory, and lounge upon their couches; eating lambs taken from the flock, and calves from the stall; ...who drink wine from bowls, and anoint themselves with the best oils, but are not made ill by the collapse of Joseph” (Amos 4:6-7).

The neglect of the poor by the rich and the leaders was not different during the time of Jesus, which was why Jesus gave the parable of the rich man and Lazarus: “There was a rich man who dressed in purple garments and fine linen and dined sumptuously each day. And lying at his door was a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who would gladly have eaten his fill of the scraps that fell from the rich man’s table. Dogs even used to come and lick his sores” (Luke 16:19-21).

The rich man did nothing wrong for being rich. His three sins were: lack of moderation (“dressed in purple garments and fine linen and dined sumptuously each day”), negligence, and lack of compassion (“lying at his door was a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who would gladly have eaten his fill of the scraps that fell from the rich man’s table”). While the rich man did not show compassion to Lazarus, the rich man’s dogs did. The dogs, ordinarily, would have barked and driven Lazarus away from their master’s gate. Instead, the dogs showed him compassion by licking his sores.

The neglect of the poor, despite the world’s rich resources, may be worse in our time than it was during the time of Amos and the time of Jesus. Some rich countries do not care about the plight of poor countries. Rather, some rich countries are recolonizing poor countries by offering them high interest loans and all kinds of Greek gifts instead of assisting in their development. Activities and operations of rich countries’ multinational companies in poor countries further impoverish the poor countries. It’s a fact that some corrupt rulers wine and dine excessively and do not care about the sufferings of the majority of the people who are poor. The funds that should have been used for the benefit of the poor is stolen and spent on life of vanity. They “are not made ill by the collapse of Joseph” (Amos 4:7).

There is a story of a poor widow whose husband passed away. The widow went to a rich man in her village and requested for financial help to bury her husband. The rich man, who had so many lands, demanded that his financial help to her was only going to be on the condition that the widow transferred to him the ownership of the only piece of land that belonged to her and her children.

We may not be among the heartless rich people, or among the corrupt political and economic leaders who waste and squander the wealth that would have benefited the poor; but we are all called to be compassionate and caring; to open our eyes and see the ‘Lazarus’ lying at our door; and to open our hearts to help them.

The readings invite us to evaluate how we are performing our Christian duties of works of mercy. Corporal works of mercy are: feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, clothe the naked, visit the sick and imprisoned (Matthew 25:35-36), and bury the dead (Tobit 1:17-18). Spiritual works of mercy are: instruct the ignorant (Romans 2:20), counsel the doubtful (1 Thessalonians 5:11), admonish sinners (1 Thessalonians 5:14), bear wrong patiently (Luke 6:27-28), forgive offences (Matthew 6:12), comfort the sorrowful (2 Corinthians 1:4), and pray for the living (1 Timothy 2:1), and the dead (2 Maccabees 12:46).

We conclude our reflection with these three passages:

“Whoever has two tunics should share with the person who has none. And whoever has food should do likewise” (Luke 3:11).

“If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and has no food for the day, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well,’ but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is it? So also, faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead” (James 2:14-17).

“When you make a loan of any kind to your neighbor, ... If the person is poor, you shall not sleep in the pledged garment, but shall definitely return it at sunset, so that your neighbor may sleep in the garment and bless you. ... You shall not exploit a poor and needy hired servant, whether one of your own kindred or one of the resident aliens who live in your land, within your gates. On each day you shall pay the servant’s wages before the sun goes down, since the servant is poor and is counting on them. Otherwise, the servant will cry to the Lord against you, and you will be held guilty” (Deuteronomy 24:11-15).

Fr. Martin Eke, MSP