

This past week I was out to dinner one evening with a friend  
who is also a pastor.

As often happens, the question came,

“What are you preaching this weekend?”

We had a helpful discussion about the texts we just heard proclaimed  
and I came away with some helpful insights.

I’m embarrassed to tell you that it was only later  
when writing my homily, that I realized our conversation took place  
over just the kind of repast Amos railed against  
and the kind of dinner the rich man regularly had  
but from which Lazarus got not so much as a scrap.

How insulated we can become from the realities of poverty  
such that we can discuss them over a table set for fine dining  
and yet not “be made ill by the collapse of Joseph...”

These scriptures are not easy for us to hear  
because the level of our comfort and assurances of it  
are so much a part of our lives.

Perhaps if we look at some of the details in the gospel story  
we’ll get within striking distance of Jesus’ message for us.

When Jesus says Lazarus was lying at the rich man’s door,  
we should picture the gate of a 1<sup>st</sup> century compound of dwellings  
in which the rich man and his family and servants lived.

A kind of scriptural pre-cursor of the “gated community.”

That door was both the portal  
through which the rich man had outlet to those in need  
and also the door that kept Lazarus from eating  
even the rich man’s garbage.

Where are the doors in my life and yours  
that give us outlet, access to those in need  
beyond our compounds of plenty  
and how do those same doorways keep the poor at a distance,  
keeping us from meeting them, knowing them, serving them?

Our parish has programs specifically designed to help us get beyond  
our threshold of comfort and face to face with those in need:  
- on Sunday nights, groups of our young people  
go to Boston to serve meals at the rescue mission;  
- our summer service trips for our young people  
take them even out of state to serve the poor.

Jesus is calling us in just that direction:  
to open the doors that maintain the “chasm”  
between us who have so much and those who have so little.

And who is in need just on the threshold of our hearts  
in our families? in our neighborhoods? in our parish?  
at school? at work?

Whose needs are kept from our notice  
because we are so intensely focused on our own and family's needs?  
Do families not need to serve those in need?

Notice that the rich man, when he dies, refers to Lazarus by name.  
A further indictment of this wealthy man.  
He was NOT unaware of the man at his door – he knew him by name,  
but still neglected his needs.

Who is at our doors?  
It might be someone we know by name,  
or by a nation's name, or by a group's name:  
the homeless, the hungry, the third-world...

So many have a claim on my heart  
and on my life's overabundance of material goods and wealth.

Will I bridge the chasm that separates me from them  
or risk the chasm for which there is no bridge?

The rich man not only knows Lazarus by name but even in DEATH,  
the wealthy man expects the poor man to serve his needs:  
“Father Abraham, *send Lazarus to bring me a cool drink!*  
*Send Lazarus to warn my household of this torment!*

Somehow, the rich man expects Lazarus to be his servant.  
Entitlement.

Someone ought to serve my needs...  
Who are the people in my life who serve me?  
Do I think of them servants, because I might pay them?  
Do I forget that they are brothers and sisters?  
Do I take them for granted?  
Do I expect that others should wait on me?

These are, indeed, difficult texts for us to hear,  
for me to preach and for us to wrestle with.  
Is there any good news here?

In a curious way the good news is this:  
right now, in this place, we are guests of the Lord.  
We are the recipients of his generous invitation  
for us to join him at his table.

He will not throw us scraps from the table, but rather,  
he will offer us the finest food and the choicest drink:  
he will offer himself as our nourishment,  
we will feast on his life, given for us.

For Christ has crossed the threshold of our humanity  
and has dwells within us even as he invites us to dwell within him.

May the hospitality and welcome we receive here  
open the doors of our hearts  
that we might cross the thresholds of our own comfort

to go out, to meet, to invite in and to serve the needs of Christ  
who hungers, thirsts and lives in our neighbor,  
at our doorstep and around the world.

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