

**THE RICH MAN AND POOR LAZARUS**  
**Caring for Humanity**  
**Luke 16:19-31**

**By Archpriest Peter Olsen**  
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When I was a letter carrier I once served a route that was literally divided in half. The upper half of the route consisted of expensive homes with manicured lawns and gardens. Naturally, the patrons whom I served in this half of my route were upper middle class or wealthy. The lower half of my route was the exact opposite. My postal patrons in this section lived, for the most part, in low income housing and received public assistance. In a word, they were poor. It is customary to tip your postman Christmastime. I did not feel entitled or expect to be tipped, but I mention this for the sake of illustration. How do you think the two halves of my route compared to each other as to how they treated me when Christmastime came around? The upper half of my route mostly gave me average or small tips. Some of those patrons, who I saw numerous times during the year and also habitually regaled me with special requests suddenly disappeared during the month of December. Like a magician doing a disappearing act, they would suddenly reappear after the new year. You have probably already surmised how the poor people on my route treated me. They were extremely generous and far outdid their wealthy neighbors who lived on the upper half of my route. Why do you suppose the behavior between the rich and the poor differed so much? Why do you suppose that those who were blessed with abundance gave so little, but those who struggled to eke out a living gave so much more?

The rich man in today's parable is egotistical and self-centered. His counterpart in today's world probably donates to philanthropic causes and public institutions, such as universities, and receives public adulation and honorary degrees in return. However, just like the rich man in today's parable, they are indifferent and ignore the poor individuals whom they encounter in everyday life. The people, such as those who lived in the lower section of my mail route, have little, and therefore they have a deeper sympathy and understanding of what it means to suffer and to be poor. It is these people who will put their hands deep within their pockets in order to help the poor and show generosity, such as the generosity they bestowed upon me.

The rich man loved himself and dressed in fine expensive clothing and lived a carnal life filled with sensual pleasures and lust. His inner life, however, was one of barrenness and poverty. Despite all the earthly pleasures, he was bored, miserable and unhappy. Man is only happy when he shares with others. It is in caring for others that we find the meaning and purpose of life. It is not possible to appreciate the experience of joy without first knowing what it means to suffer. It is impossible for us to experience the great joy of Pascha unless we first undergo the struggles of Great Lent. There can be no Resurrection without the suffering of Great and Holy Friday. The rich man looked down his nose at Lazarus and did not know what it meant to be weak and helpless. Only when we are weak and helpless as our neighbor can we help him. Then there is no spirit of judgment, no sense of superiority. We are his companion in repentance. We too are waiting for grace, just as he is. The rich man must see his own weakness and poverty before he can care for anyone else, including Lazarus.

It is impossible for us to exist and be unrelated to the universe and the people around us. Existence causes us to be related to everyone and everything. Love and care makes us into responsible beings, reacting to others. Their sorrows become our sorrows, and their joys become our joys. Care means helping others to grow and develop. The greatest therapy for the uncaring person would be for the frustrated egotist to get his back off the couch, get on his feet and serve. His weakness would pass out through his fingers. Holy Scripture tells us that God is love. Love and its companion sympathy can move mountains and heal spiritual and physical brokenness. The Greek origin of the word "sympathy" implies "suffering with," or "co-suffering." It is a kind of silent understanding when heart meets heart. It is like taking the heart

out of one's body and placing it in the body of another person, and in exchange receives the other person's heart. It is not mere pity, for pity can be like the traveler in the gospel who looked on the wounded man but did not help. St. Paul told the Romans: "Weep with those that weep" (Romans 12:15). The foundation of all true sympathy, and that which makes it universal, is love. When one comes to the love of Christ, there is a union of sympathy with the understanding of the mystery of pain. Through our love of Christ we can learn to have sympathy with all people, not in the way of condescension, but as people hating the sin and loving the sinner....Love consists of three intimacies: hearing, seeing, and touch. Touch is the language of love. When our Savior healed the leper, he heard and saw the leper, but the greatest expression of His love was when He touched the leper, and through this touch of love the leper was healed. May the love of Christ grow stronger day by day in our hearts so that we may do as our Savior commands us, to love our neighbors as ourselves (Mark 12:31). Amen.

