

**SERMON - THE RICH MAN AND POOR LAZARUS - Luke 16:19-31**  
**Given at St. James Orthodox Church, Beaufort, SC, October 22, 2017**

In the Gospel Jesus spends a great deal of time trying to teach us how we should treat one another. If we look at the Ten Commandments, half of the commandments concern our relationship with God, and the other half of the commandments concern our relationship with each other.

In Matthew 7:12 Jesus says, "Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the law and the prophets."

In Luke 6:31 Jesus says, "And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise."

In Leviticus 19:18 it says, "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against your countrymen. Love your fellow as yourself. I am the Lord."

No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted. What we do for ourselves alone dies with us. What we do for others remains and lives forever. The good things in our lives that we remember the most, that we never forget, and which leave a lasting impression on us, are the times when someone has shown us love and an act of kindness.

The scene described in today's parable is very sad and certainly does not follow the teachings of our Lord. A poor man named Lazarus, homeless and sick with sores and starving for food, lays at the door of a very wealthy man. Daily the wealthy man goes about his business trying to get more and more for himself, indulging in the carnal pleasures of life, and ignores poor Lazarus who is laying at his doorstep. This rich man is so greedy and selfish that Lazarus is invisible and doesn't even exist to him. It never even occurs to the rich man to consider sharing one penny from his millions or a scrap of food from his abundance with Lazarus. In Genesis we learn that man is created in the image and likeness of God. Lazarus, poor and sickly and full of sores, homeless and starving, is created in the image and likeness of God. After the flood, after sinful mankind is destroyed, the very first thing that God does is to require a reckoning of how men treat each other. In Genesis chapter 9 God makes a covenant with man and tells Noah and his sons: "I will require it of every beast; of man, too, will I require a reckoning for human life, of every man for that of his fellow man! Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in His image did God make man." In Matthew chapter 25 Jesus says that on Judgement Day the Lord will ask us if we fed the hungry, if we gave drink to the thirsty, if we welcomed the stranger, if we clothed the naked, if we visited the sick and if we visited those who are in prison. Jesus says, "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren you did it to me." Therefore, when the rich man ignores and neglects Lazarus, it is the same thing as if he is ignoring and neglecting the Lord Himself.

In this parable Jesus deliberately does not tell us the name of the rich man. Only the poor man's name revealed to us. Lazarus, because of his suffering in his lifetime, in death is received into the bosom of Abraham. Lazarus, and all those who have shown love and kindness and care for their fellow man will have their names inscribed in the Book of Life for eternity. The rich man is nameless, because now that he has died, not only is his name not inscribed in the Book of Life, but the way he lived his life has resulted in suffering beyond the grave. In place of the rich scarlet robes that the rich man wore in his lifetime, now in death he is engulfed in the red flames of torment. Just as the dogs licked the sores of Lazarus in his lifetime, now in death the rich man begs Abraham to allow Lazarus to place a drop of water on his finger and bring it to him, in order for the rich man to have some relief from his burning unquenchable thirst. In the Gospel of St. John which is read at the funeral service, it says: "for the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come forth, those who

have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment.” In today’s parable the scene of God’s judgment is vividly revealed to us in a very concrete way. It is horrific and frightening to see the actual consequences which await those who have led a selfish, greedy and evil life. It is not even possible for the evil who face judgment to receive even a drop of comfort, because, as Abraham reveals in the parable, the chasm and separation between the saved and the judged is too great.

On the fifth Sunday of Great Lent there is a canon during matins which deals with the theme of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. All of us are encouraged to examine our consciences and to reflect on how we have fallen short of our Christian duty to practice love and kindness and to share our blessings with others. We are all asked to think of how we have been selfish and self-indulgent, and how we can do a better job caring for the poor and the needy. We are called upon to ask for forgiveness for those times when we have been neglectful of others. In the canon it is us, you and me, who are like the rich man and have been neglectful of our fellow man, and have been selfish and have not shown the compassion which is required of us. In part, it says in the canon, “Lord, I am as wealthy as the rich man in passions and lusts, yet in my lack of virtues I am as poor as Lazarus! But save me! Like the rich man who spent all his days in pleasure, I am rich in the deceptive joys of this life, but I pray You, Loving Lord, in Your compassion deliver me from the fire as You saved Lazarus.” And at the end of the canon it summarizes for us the lesson it has drawn from the parable: “We have all learned the meaning of this parable from the Lord. Let us all, then, hate the rich man’s lack of compassion that we may escape punishment and rejoice forever with Abraham.” Amen.