

**“It is Better to Give than to Receive”
THE RICH MAN AND POOR LAZARUS**

Luke 16:19-31

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During my visits to Russia, I saw many people who were poor. If not poor, they certainly were not as financially blessed as the average American. I noticed that they were very careful about how they spend their money. Every rouble, every dollar was spent with care and thought. Shortly after my first visit to Russia I found myself in Manhattan. I visited a few shops, and I noticed for the first time how seemingly frivolously and easily people in the shops literally threw their money around. I was amazed as I observed large amounts of money easily being spent on what seemed to me to be ridiculous and frivolous items. Moreover, it was obvious that the items purchased were worth much less than what these customers easily and freely were willing to spend on them. I was simply amazed at the contrast of the behavior between the people in America and the people in Russia. I was reminded of the words spoken to me by a priest friend of mine. He once told me that he and his wife were once sitting at home, and as he looked around him, he said, “Look at all this stuff.” It is astounding how easy it is in our lives to accumulate so much “stuff.” Perhaps at one time some statue or trinket or, as they say in Yiddish, some “tchotchki” tantalized our eyes and our senses and we bought the item. Later, as time went on, many of these items no longer seemed important to us, and they actually became a burden to us, because we have to dust them and because they take up room and fill the limited space in our homes. Often they end up in a drawer or in a box in the attic or in the basement. If we were to add all the money that we spent on these things, I imagine it would be a large sum. Men and women are equally guilty of this. I know a woman who, like a second Imelda Marcos*, has acquired baskets and baskets full of shoes. How many pairs of shoes can one person wear in a lifetime?

St. John Chrysostom was very strict about this. He said that every dollar spent on something that is not needed is the same as robbing a dollar from the poor. By the same token, this same saint admonishes us to properly adorn our churches and not be stingy when doing so. For example, whatever we might spend on a new kitchen, or flooring, or appliances, or furniture in our homes, shouldn't we at least spend the same if not more when making similar purchases for the House of God? Isn't it a sin to be selfish and overindulgent when it comes to our own pleasures, but stingy and cheap when it comes to the church? I know a husband and wife whose home was paid off and whose furniture and appliances were all fine, yet decided they needed to buy all new appliances and furniture for no logical reason except pure self-indulgence and jealousy for what others have. In order to do this they borrowed money against their home and took out a new mortgage. Now the husband is dying and they have no savings. What will the wife do with her new appliances and furniture which are now meaningless when she will have to struggle to pay a mortgage that she shouldn't even have after her husband dies? We spend and selfishly indulge ourselves and forget that one day we will all die and all of these “tchotchkis” will end up on someone else's shelves or in a garbage can.

In the story that Jesus tells us today, a rich man daily would walk by a poor, homeless, ill and hungry man named Lazarus who lay in the street at his doorstep. Not once did this rich man with his fine expensive wardrobe and his expensive parties and banquets consider to give poor Lazarus even some leftovers from his table, or perhaps an old pair of shoes so that Lazarus would not have to suffer being barefoot. The rich man wore invisible blinders of selfishness and could not see past his own nose, and had no care or concern about any human being who might be in need of help and charity, even when it stared him right in the face.

Concerning Judgment Day, Jesus will say to those on His left hand, “Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave

me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison, and you did not visit me... Truly I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me.' And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life" (Matt. 25:41-46). Much is revealed to us in this parable by our Savior. In the next life we see that there will be a huge insurmountable chasm between the saved and those or not saved. Perhaps not in this life, but in the next life for sure justice will prevail. We see poor Lazarus in the bosom of Abraham. We see the rich man {whose name we do not even know because his name is not inscribed in the Book of Life} on the other side of the chasm in terrible torment. The man who spent his life drinking fine wines from golden and silver goblets is now eternally tormented by thirst. And poor Lazarus, who was starving and hungry daily, is now filled and satiated. The rich man never noticed or helped Lazarus before, but now he begs Abraham to let Lazarus dip his finger in some cool water and bring it to him so that he may receive some relief from the torment of his thirst. And Abraham reveals with love and sadness to the man who was rich in earthly possessions but destitute in the riches of the heart that the chasm separating him from Lazarus was so great that it was impossible for Lazarus to cross over and relieve his thirst. For you see, my brethren, the only riches and possessions that we will take with us to the grave and into the next life are the treasures of the heart, and woe to the man or woman who is destitute in their heart of the works and riches of God when the time come to give up one's soul.

A very famous entertainer once said, "I ain't no saint, but I've tried never to do anything that would hurt my family or offend God...I'm so lucky to be in the position to give. It's really a gift to give. If one can't give what they have and share then they will always be empty. Sharing money is what gives it its value. The Lord can give, and the Lord can take away. Next year I might be herding sheep or something." I could write pages about the generosity of this man to strangers, charities, those in need, family and friends. Every year he distributed about two million dollars to various charities. One of a zillion examples of his love and charity was that after reading about a local crippled woman, he visited her in her home and bought her a new wheelchair. Every year at Christmastime he would distribute an envelope to each person in an endless line of organized charities, his total donations adding up to \$100,000. In 1961 he did a benefit concert in Hawaii where he even bought a ticket for himself, even though he was the performer. The entire proceeds of over \$65,000 was donated to build the USS Arizona Memorial in Pearl Harbor. His entire proceeds from his famous 1973 "Aloha from Hawaii" satellite-concert was donated to the Kui Lee cancer fund. When he heard about a couple of fans who were very disappointed because they mis-scheduled their wedding on a day that they had tickets to see him in concert, not only did he replace their tickets for a concert on a different day, but he gave them \$10,000 and a Cadillac as a wedding present. A stranger saw him fishing around in his pockets near a phone booth and gave him a dime to make a phone call. He sent the kind stranger a thank you note and also paid off the mortgage on his house.

He clearly believed in sharing his blessings with others. His choices were diverse and showed no preference for age, race or creed. He saw only the need. He paid hospital bills, donated to many charities and reached out to many in need, providing financial assistance for the necessities of life. Much of what he did was done quietly, without fanfare. He understood very well that true happiness was not in receiving for oneself but in giving and sharing with others. His name was Elvis Presley. He had much, but he gave much, even much more than the Biblical standard of tithing (10% of one's gross income).

Our Savior calls upon us today to have compassion and empathy for the poor. We are called upon to help and to serve those around us in whatever way we can. We are called upon to remember that true happiness is not in receiving ~ but in giving to others. Amen

* Imelda Marcos was the First Lady of the Philippines. It is well known that she owned 3,000 pairs of shoes.