



5TH SUNDAY OF LUKE

October 30

THE GOSPEL READING

Luke 16:19-31

[The Rich Man and Lazarus]

The Lord said, "There was a rich man, who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, full of sores, who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table; moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried; and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes, and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus in his bosom. And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy upon me, and send Lazaros to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in anguish in this flame.' But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazaros in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.' And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers, so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.' But Abraham said, 'They have Moses, and the prophets; let them hear them.' And he said, 'No, father Abraham; but if some one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' He said to them, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if some one should rise from the dead.'"



GREEK ORTHODOX
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THE SERMON

The story of the rich man and Lazaros is a window through which we get a glimpse of the eternal state of our souls and the life that continues beyond what we can experience in this world. The Lord does not call it a parable because it is a story with real people and events, not just symbolic elements. In the story, the rich man wears expensive clothes, dresses like a king, and throws exquisite parties every day. From a worldly perspective, he has it all. He is healthy, wealthy, and surrounded by people celebrating daily.

However, in the same place where this is taking place, just on the other side of the mansion's walls, there is a beggar named Lazaros. In sharp contrast to the rich man, Lazaros lacks all things of this world; he is poor, sick, and alone. The only company he has is of the street dogs licking his wounds. This story takes place in two contrasting worlds, two opposite lives. The Lord gives us the picture of their lives in this world, which is temporary, and then He opens up the eternal window, giving us the reality of the world to come, of the life that never ends.

The rich man and Lazaros die, and their roles and places are reversed. The rich man finds himself in a place of distress, poverty, spiritual sickness, and loneliness. Lazaros, on the other hand, finds himself in a place of comfort. He is on the other side and now separated not by a wall but by an abyss. Lazaros is no longer poor, sick, or alone; he is resting, as we pray in the memorial services, "in a place of light, in a place of green pasture, in a place of refreshment, from where pain and sorrow and mourning have fled away."

The Lord tells us that Lazaros is in the company of Abraham, the Father of the Faith, in the Jewish and Christian traditions. They are together because even in his previous state of poverty and sickness, Lazaros had faith in God. In his earthly life, the poor man lacked all things of this world, but he did not lack trust in God — and now he encounters the love of God for which he longed.

On the other hand, during his earthly life the rich man only had faith in himself and his riches. Saint Cyril of Alexandria says that the rich man had been crueler than the dogs because he felt no sympathy or compassion for Lazaros but was completely unmerciful. He had turned away from the love of God, and he only loved the things of this world. Now, he finds himself anguished. The love of God, which brings light and refreshment when we open ourselves to Him, is otherwise experienced by those who reject Him as an unwelcome light. God still loves, but the rich man has closed himself to the love of God. Now that the veil of this life is taken away, and he can no longer ignore the presence of the love of God, the rich man finds himself anguished by that divine love.

In the afterlife, the rich man and Lazaros are fully conscious and have memories of their life on earth. As Saint Gregory of Nazianzos says, the rich man knows Lazaros, whom he had despised, and remembers his brethren whom he had left; he is anguished by the glory of Lazaros. The tragedy in the rich man's life was not his riches but the love of mon-

ey. The rich man loved himself and his money and needed no one; he ignored the destitute man who had laid at his door and begged for the crumbs off his table. Now, for the first time, he acknowledges Lazaros and begs for a drop of water. Abraham answers him, not with revenge or condescension, but instead calls him “son;” and tells him that in the realm of eternal life, what we have chosen to love will forever determine what we are capable of loving.

The rich man has become a stranger to God’s love because he spent his life rejecting that love, so now he cannot join Lazaros and Abraham in blessedness. The rich man’s name is never given in the story because, in a real sense, his memory is not eternal. God is the source of our identity and humanity. If we forget God, we forget ourselves — even our own names, so to speak — because then we lose our humanity. The rich man had hardened his heart against God’s love and the love of his neighbor. During his life, he had no compassion, and he closed his eyes and his hands to the one suffering in front of him. Now in the eternal state, he is also incapable of loving, so his soul cannot receive the water to cool his soul.

The rich man asks Abraham to warn his brothers who are left in this life. As Saint Augustine of Hippo reminds us, in this life, we should relieve those we can, since hereafter, even if we are well received, we will not be able to give help to those we love. Abraham explains that if we do not believe the Word of God in the Scriptures (which tells us to love the Lord our God with all our soul, mind, heart, and strength), neither will we believe Christ Himself, risen from the dead.

The Word has been given to us, Christ is risen, and He pours the love of God into our hearts in the Holy Spirit. All we have to do is to receive Him, be open to Him, and in this way, His love will overflow to others as well, especially those in need. To love others in practical, concrete ways, when done out of a heart filled with the love of God, unites us with Christ. This openness to God in our lives gives us a sure hope that when we leave this world, we will be with Abraham, the Father of the Faith, receiving that which he had sought all along — the comforting, illuminating, and life-giving love of God.