

## **HOMILY – 26<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME**

Again this week, our first reading is from the prophet, Amos. Amos is certainly a favorite among those who work for justice. “Woe to the complacent.” he cries.

A basic theme that runs through all the scripture is God’s desire to set things right. We hear strong overtones of Amos in today’s Gospel, as we hear one of the stories that Jesus told – the story of Dives and Lazarus. Dives simply means “rich man”.

The rich man dressed in purple garments. He’d be the guy in the Armani suits and Gucci glasses driving the Ferrare. Lazarus has nothing; he’s covered with sores and sits at the gate. The rich man seems unaware of the plight of Lazarus. He comes off as self indulgent and complacent. And God, obviously, is not pleased with the situation.

The story always makes me uncomfortable. Even though I don’t have an Armani suit or a Lexus, I’ve got a lot and I know that that is okay, but – do I ignore Lazarus at the door? – that’s not okay!

As I enjoy my material goods, do I always maintain a strong sense of the common good? Do I make sure I am not benefiting at the expense of the poor?

Charity is very important. Last week’s bulletin contained an insert about our parish St. Vincent de Paul Society and the great work of charity they do in our name. St. Vincent de Paul is our front line of contact to the Lazarus who comes to our gate. If you want to make sure you never neglect Lazarus at the gate, then join the efforts of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, or at least pick up one of their offering envelopes at the doors of the church, bring food for our monthly food drive, donate diapers, walk or donate to the CROP Walk for World Hunger, dance for Cystic Fibrosis.

In order to attend properly to the poor, to ease their struggle and improve their lot, we are required not merely to practice charity, but to exercise justice. Charity, however generous, is a temporary band-aid – a stopgap effort that quiets hunger pangs with an occasional handout.

Justice, on the other hand, is a purposeful, well-planned effort that tackles the problem at its roots rather than merely relieving its symptoms. What the Lazarus in our midst needs, therefore, are frequent doses of charity followed by long term, sustained doses of justice. No easy task.

Who are the Lazarus’s at our gate? A wise Jesuit preacher, Walter Burghardt, in his book, “Justice: A Global Adventure” reminds us we don’t have to look hard to find them. Lazarus lives in the children of the world who are dying each day from war, hunger, abuse, neglect, and diseases that could easily be prevented if their parents had the pennies needed to immunize them.

Lazarus lives in the immigrants, refugees, and otherwise displaced persons on this earth for whom the lack of appropriate documents or a valid address, subjects them to immoral treatment that is unconscionable for Christians.

Lazarus also lives in the homeless, many of who are mentally ill or emotionally scarred by their ordeal. Lazarus also lives in the homeless veterans deeply scarred by so many wars. According to the Veterans Administration, on any given night, more than 275,000 veterans sleep on the streets of our cities.

Lazarus also lives in those who languish in hospitals, convalescent and nursing homes where no one visits, and in those who suffer from Alzheimer's, dementia, and all those other diseases that rob people of their personalities, memories, and dignity.

Lazarus lives in people everywhere who are victims of torture and genocide and war. Lazarus lives and cries out with what seems to be an unheard scream in Darfur, the Congo, Uganda, Brazil, and South Africa.

Lazarus still lives in FEMA trailers throughout the American South, waiting for the government and insurance companies to settle claims that will enable them to reconstruct their lives and livelihoods.

Lazarus still lives in the hundreds of thousands of AIDS orphans throughout the World who have no one to care for them.

Our gathering here each week as a wide and diverse group to worship, our proclamation that "All are Welcome", should remind us that every Lazarus is a child of God, created in God's image. For that reason, regardless of whatever disguise may dim that reflection, every Lazarus deserves my respect, my concern, my charity, and my regular pursuit of justice.

Obviously, no one of us is going to be able to care for all the Lazarus's in the world. We can't do everything; we can't give to every cause, feed every beggar. But, we can do something, and there should be a great sense of liberation in that.

There is a great story told of a woman who lived by the shore, where every morning, when the tide went out, the beach would be covered with star fish that would be scorched by the morning sun and die on the beach. She would walk along the beach each day, picking up the starfish and tossing them back into the sea.

One day a fisherman who watched her effort each day mocked her saying, "You silly Lady! There are thousands of starfish dying on this beach everyday. Do you think your feeble efforts are going to make any difference? She reached down, picked up another starfish, tossed it back into the sea, and then said to the mocking fisherman, "I know for sure that it made a difference to that one."

Never allow the number of Lazarus's in the world to overwhelm you, to keep you from action. Keep your focus on the good you can do, where you are with what you've got – as little as that might seem. None of us are asked to do it all.

CROPWALK – St. Vincent de Paul – Food and Diaper Drive – Marathon for Heart Disease – Tuition for Students in San Andres – Anchor House Walk –

All of us are asked to do something and to do it well, with a grateful heart. That small something can make all the difference in the world.