

Homily for Sunday, September 28, 2025

Last weekend's gospel parable, if you recall, was about a dishonest manager who considered three different strategies because he was about to be fired and would have no place to live. He was desperate for someone to show him mercy. The first



strategy of blaming someone else was not going to work. The second strategy of playing the “poor-me-I’m-the-real-victim-in-all-of-this” card wasn’t going to work either. So, he opted for the third strategy, which did work. He gave mercy

away to people who needed it, and by doing so, he was carried into deeper and deeper levels of mercy for himself.

The rich man in today's gospel does not extend mercy to Lazarus. By turning off the tap of mercy for others, he has turned off mercy for himself when he needed it most. You see there are not two forms of mercy, two taps you might say. It's not like because we turned the tap of mercy off on our side, God—in an act of vengeance— say, “I'm going to turn my tap of mercy off for you.” There is only one mercy. There's only one tap. It's either flowing or it's not. There's only one tap, and we are in control of that tap. We turn it on and we turn it off. It's a choice we make one way or the other. It's not God's choice, *per se*, although I have to admit God has been far more merciful to me than I have been to others.

If we are created in the image and likeness of God, then we must do as God does. I must turn the tap on and show mercy to others because that is what God does. God does not turn the tap off on any of us; we turn it off and withhold it from one another. We also have power to show mercy. You've all heard the expression, "to err is human, to forgive is divine" (Alexander Pope). When we act mercifully toward each other, and especially towards the poor of this world, we are acting like God. We have the power of the divine pulsing through us. To forgive, to show mercy really is divine. We are never more like the divine than when we are showing mercy. Pope Francis said that if we could reduce God's many names down to one name, that name would be Mercy. If God does not shut the tap of mercy off, then God also does not create the insurmountable chasm between the land of the living and the dead, the chasm between the rich and the poor, which seems only to be getting wider and wider.

This is not a parable meant to scare us into a change of behavior. God is not coming into our lives like an ex-criminal comes into a prison to scare the new inmates straight. The way of change is not to fear future torment but to listen to Moses and the prophets; that's how we change.

The rich man's sin was not that he was wealthy, for there will always be someone wealthier than us. His sin was that he didn't share it with those in need. But, I think his sin started long before that. It started with blindness. He didn't see or didn't make the effort to see poor Lazarus by his gate. I don't think it was an

honest oversight on his part, like Lazarus was camouflaged in the nearby bushes. He was at the rich man's gate every day. The rich man chose to step over him.

In the Gospel of John, sin is not defined by some bad act that we did, and now we must repent from it. In John's Gospel, sin is defined as blindness. We choose not to see, and so our sin remains. How does John's Gospel start? "Jesus came into the world as the light of the world, but his own people did not accept him; they preferred the darkness instead" (Jn. 1:9-10). It's a mystery in my own life. The light comes freely into my own life, but I can easily choose not to see with it and prefer to remain blind instead.

Sunday (today) is World Day of Migrants and Refugees. Tuesday, for us here in Canada, is National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. Both these days remind me of how easy it is to see what I want to see and dismiss what I don't want to see. Am I bridging chasms in my life or making them worse? Are we as Church listening to Moses and the prophets of the past? And more importantly, are we listening to the prophets walking and talking in our world today?

Here's a quote from a contemporary spiritual writer, and a Canadian at that, who is speaking about the gift of Celtic spirituality and how we would do well to rediscover the insights it offers. He writes: ***Many years ago, I was giving a talk in Ottawa on some of these themes. I began the presentation by using a phrase from the prologue to St. John's Gospel, "The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world" (Jn. 1:9). I spoke of the way the Celtic tradition invites us to look for this light in one another and in everything that***

has being. Attending the talk that evening was a young Mohawk elder who had been invited to be there specifically to make observations at the end of my talk about the resonances between Celtic and Native wisdom. The Mohawk elder stood with tears in his eyes as he spoke. He said, "As I have been listening to these themes, I have been wondering where I would be tonight, I have been wondering where my people would be tonight, and I have been wondering where we would be as a Western world tonight, if the mission that had come to us from Europe centuries ago had come expecting to find light in us" (Sacred Earth, Sacred Soil. p. 12). I guess when we think we are the light and the only light necessary, what's the point in opening our eyes to light anywhere else, even in God?

The rich man never repents of his ways and so remains blind, even in hell. He got everything he wanted in life. Now in death he's even trying to boss Abraham around. "Give me water" is the first command he thinks Abraham should bow to. "Warn my brothers" is the next command. His self-serving ego was still in charge. He was not an evil man. He didn't kick, punch, or slap Lazarus. He did something far worse...he chose not to see him at all.

Who are the prophets of today? And, what are they inviting us to see?

~Fr. Phil