

# Homily for the 26<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

September 28-29, 2019

Readings: Amos 6: 1A, 4-7; 1 Timothy 6: 11-16; Luke 16: 19-31

Preacher: Margot Van Etten

Two images from Facebook ...

A small sixteen-year-old girl stands in front of the high and the mighty at the United Nations and passionately denounces their failure to act, their fixation on “money and the fantasy of unending growth,” while the future of generations is destroyed and the planet collapses around them.

Rainy day. In a restaurant a woman notices the dripping-wet man come in, sit down in a dark booth and begin eating—ketchup. Only ketchup. Something pushes her to go over, strike up a conversation. He has no money, so she shares her sandwich with him. When she learns he hasn't eaten in three days she orders several large take-out meals, has them bagged up and gives them to him.

Worlds can change, depending on whether or not we pay attention.

Through Amos, God thunders at the rich and powerful, self-absorbed princes and leaders of Israel, too focused on their delicate luxuries to notice the suffering and degradation of their own people. Greta Thunberg did much the same in New York—a small prophet with a child's braid and a powerful warning. “People are dying. People are suffering. Entire ecosystems are collapsing.” *And yet they are not made ill by the collapse of Joseph...*

And then there's Lazarus. Ironic name, that: It means, “God has helped.” Perhaps he is planted outside the Rich Man's gate so that God can help him through the charity of this exceedingly rich person. If so, the plan is thwarted.

Luke lets us know that this man is not just wealthy: he is an incredibly rich person. He wraps himself in linen and purple—the equivalent of nineteen thousand dollars drapes his shoulders, so costly was purple fabric in those days. He has no name: his whole identity is in his enormous wealth and luxury.

And the Rich Man never *sees* the poor soul he passes every day, not even enough to grumble that he's cluttering the doorway. Lazarus' presence just does not register. No crumb from this table goes to help, no balm for his sores. The potential helper totally overlooks him.

Have you noticed that, in all of Jesus' parables, *this is the only one where a character is depicted actually in Hell?*

The fatal sin is not just failure to reach into his vast wealth to offer help. What caused this failure—the deeper sin—is that he overlooked this desperate human being. So wrapped up in the cocoon of extravagance, so consumed with his own consumption that he never saw. Never *looked*. Never took note of this brother lying at his door.

And still, now that *he* is in this desperate state, never once does he speak directly to Lazarus. Oh, he knows his name—which means that he knew who this man was and chose to overlook him. And he *still* ignores Lazarus. “Send Lazarus” to quench my thirst, he says to Abraham. As if Lazarus were not right there in his sight. As if Lazarus was nothing but an object that might now be useful. He never looks at Lazarus as a person.

I suspect if he ever had looked at Lazarus directly, if even now he had said, “Lazarus forgive me,” perhaps if he had said, “Lazarus, please help me”—perhaps then the great chasm would have closed, the flames quenched, and he could have joined Lazarus in bliss with Abraham. But he never does. He never moves out of his own self-centeredness to see, to relate, to help or be helped.

We must not overlook the Lazaruses of this world. Whether it’s the homeless and hungry ones, the people struggling and stressed that we encounter in our daily life, our fellow creatures on this planet, or the children of generations yet unborn, we may not overlook them. We must allow ourselves to feel the discomfort of *noticing*. And if we listen deeply to what our discomfort is telling us, in it we will find the Holy Spirit’s guidance to act in big ways or small, to heal and to help.

Two parting thoughts:

- Ask ourselves, “who or what am I overlooking today?”
- And, again, God’s challenge to us: Worlds can change, depending on whether or not we pay attention.

So...let’s do it!