

Meditations: Thursday of the Second Week of Lent

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during this season of Lent.

- Value of earthly goods
- Having compassion on those around us
- Seeing the “Lazaruses” at our door

THE GOSPEL presents us with the parable of the rich man Dives and the poor man Lazarus. The first is a person who lives in luxury, thinking only of his own well-being. Jesus doesn't tell us that he was unjust, but

simply that he was *a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day* (Lk 16:19). A poor man named Lazarus lay sitting at his gate, covered with sores. Dives is so wrapped up in his riches that he is unaware even of his existence. Lazarus received no care and *desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table* (Lk 16:21). “Vain were his thoughts and vain his appetites.” Saint Augustine says about Dives. “When he died, on that same day all his plans perished.”^[1] Indeed, Jesus tells us that they both die, but their fate is abysmally different.

Lord, see that my path is not wicked, and lead me in the way everlasting (Ps 139:23-24), we plead with the psalmist. We know that a fulfilled life, in which we always remain free to love, does not depend exclusively on earthly goods, which can provide us with neither security nor

happiness. Saint Josemaría reminds us that our “heart is not satisfied with created goods, but aspires to the Creator.”^[2] Lent is a good time “to discover how the material goods we possess are helping us to carry out the mission God has entrusted to us. Then we will be able to detach ourselves more easily from those that are not helping. Like our Lord, who had ‘nowhere to lay his head’ (*Lk 9:58*), we will go forward without excess baggage. With poverty, we will learn to appreciate the world’s goods by seeing in them their value as a path for union with Him and for service to others.”^[3]

DURING HIS LIFE, Lazarus had none of the advantages that Dives enjoyed. From the story it is clear that he is a pious person, who puts his hope in God, and therefore he is taken by the

angels to his eternal dwelling place. We could well say of him what we pray in the psalm: “Blessed is the man who has put his trust in the Lord” (cf. *Ps 1*). The key that explains the eternal destiny of both, so different one from the other, is not wealth itself, but what each one’s heart contains. The rich man is condemned not for what he possesses, but for his complete lack of compassion. “Learn to be rich and poor,” Saint Augustine says, “both those of you who have goods in this world and those who have nothing. For you will find a beggar who is arrogant and a wealthy person who humbles himself. God resists the proud, whether they are dressed in silk or in rags. But He gives his grace to the humble, whether they have worldly possessions or lack them. God looks within, at a person’s heart. It is there that He weighs and examines.”^[4] —

Lazarus is of no account in the world's eyes. Because of his misery and loneliness, only God cares for him. "God does not forget those who are forgotten by all; those who are worthless in human eyes are precious in the Lord's eyes"^[5] The parable also invites us to practice the virtue of charity in a special way with the people closest to us and with those most in need. "Our possessions and our problems should never absorb our hearts to the point of making us deaf to the cry of others."^[6] "Everyone should consider their neighbor without exception as another self, taking into account first of all their life and the means needed to live it with dignity, so as not to imitate the rich man who had no concern for the poor man Lazarus."^[7]

I, THE LORD, search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds (Jer 17:9-10). After our death, God will judge us and “weigh” us according to our works. We face this clear alternative in our life: to choose the safe path of those who trust in the Lord, like Lazarus; or the sterile path of those who put all their hope in the material goods they can control, like the rich man Dives.

Saint Josemaría warned against the mentality of those who “see Christianity as a collection of devout practices, failing to realize the relation between these practices and the circumstances of ordinary life, including the urgency to meet the needs of other people and remedy injustice.”^[8] Love for God is expressed in concern for others; this is not merely a matter of sentiment but necessarily leads to specific

deeds of service to specific people, even if that means setting aside things that apparently provide security for us.

“God’s mercy towards us is closely linked to our mercy towards our neighbor; when our mercy towards others is lacking, God’s mercy cannot enter our hearts.”^[9] We ask our Lady for the grace to see clearly the “Lazaruses” who are at our door, begging for our attention and affection.

^[1] Saint Augustine, *Sermon 33 A (4th on the Old Testament)*.

^[2] Saint Josemaría, *Conversations*, no. 110.

^[3] Monsignor Fernando Ocáriz, Letter, 20 February 2021.

^[4] Saint Augustine, *On Psalm 85*.

^[5] Benedict XVI, Angelus, 30 September 2007.

^[6] Benedict XVI, Message for Lent 2012.

^[7] Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et spes*, no. 27.

^[8] Saint Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 98.

^[9] Francis, Audience, 18 May 2016.