

# Homily OT 26 – (Year C) – September 29, 2019

AM 6:1A, 4-7; PS 146:7, 8-9, 9-10; 1 TM 6:11-16; LK 16:19-31

You may have heard of the **Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola**, but not know what they are. **The Spiritual Exercises are a compilation of meditations, prayers, and contemplative practices developed by St. Ignatius...to help people deepen their relationship with God.**

<https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-spiritual-exercises/>

Ignatius discovered that knowing **who God is**, and **what he's done for us**, is key to *deepening our relationship with him*. St. **John** the Evangelist wrote in his **Gospel**:

*...God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.* (Jn 3:16-17)

In his **Letter to the Romans**, **St. Paul** helps us understand just how *much* God loved the world:

*...God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us...For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.* (Rom 5:8, 10)

God didn't **wait** for us humans to “**get our act together**” in order to invite us back into relationship with him. **God**, in his great merciful love, **made the first move**—and a *response* to that love is **necessary**.

The appropriate human response to **God's loving initiative**, then, is summed up in the **First Principle and Foundation** of the Spiritual Exercises which Ignatius explains this way:

Man is created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by this means to save his soul. The other things on the face of the earth are created for man to help him in attaining the end for which he is created. Hence, man is to make use of them in as far as they help him in the attainment of his end, and he must rid himself of them in as far as they prove a hindrance to him. Therefore, we must make ourselves *indifferent* to all created things, as far as we are allowed free choice and are not under any prohibition. Consequently, as far as we are concerned, we should not prefer health to sickness, riches to poverty, honor to dishonor, a long life to a short life. The same holds for all other things. Our one desire and choice should be what is more conducive to the end for which we are created.

First Principle and Foundation, #23

Ignatius' words serve as an excellent **jumping off point** to reflect on **Jesus' Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus**. Ignatius used the word "**indifferent**" to describe the proper orientation toward created things. Other spiritual giants have referred to this as "*holy indifference*".

A *synonym* for the word "**indifferent**" is "**unconcerned**". Ignatius suggests, then, that we **should** be **unconcerned** about such things as whether or not we are **healthy**, or **wealthy** or **honored**. That doesn't mean we **enjoy** being **sick** or **poor** or **dishonored**—unless we're masochists! **But what we should prefer is whatever is most beneficial to our relationship with God**—even if it's **not** what we would choose for ourselves!

Perhaps a **personal illustration** will help. One night, I awoke around 3AM, my **mind reeling with anxiety** about parish matters. It was so overwhelming that **sleep was impossible**.

I went to our rectory chapel to spend time in the Presence of Jesus. I said to him, "**Jesus, I don't know why you're allowing this trial right now,**

but I know *you*, and I know that you're *permitting* this for *the good of my soul*. While I don't enjoy the suffering, please don't take it away too soon, because I know I need it!

Sounds really **holy**, huh?

Well, the truth is that that was **probably the first** time in my life—let alone in my **priesthood**—that I had ever said *that* to the Lord so bluntly...and actually **meant** it!

Normally, when I'm going through a spiritual trial, I just want the Lord to **make it go away**. But, over time—and *after a lot of grumbling*—I've discovered the benefit for my spiritual life and, by extension, for my priestly ministry of **suffering...well**.

Our suffering makes us more compassionate toward others—or at least it **should**! During times of suffering, I know that I **pray** more—and more *intensely*—and am *much more aware of my need for God*. Being placed in the **crucible of suffering** trains us to **notice** and **relate to** the suffering of others because we're being *taught by God* (cf. Jn 6:45).

As soon as the trial eases up, however, I can almost always feel **spiritual laziness** start to creep in immediately! God knows **this** particular weakness in *my* soul, so he sends these trails periodically to toughen me up—to build up my **endurance** so that it will **continue** even **after** the trial has passed.

**Suffering** reminds us that we **can't** go it alone.

**Faith** reminds us that we don't *have* to!

So, applying the Ignatian Principle specifically to this **insomnia incident**, he might say that it is good for me **not** to prefer **sleep** to **insomnia**, or a **trouble-free mind** to **trial** because — while it **does** lead to physical and mental strain the following day — it also brings me closer to God.

How, then, does this principle of “**holy indifference**” apply to the parable...and *what lessons can we draw* from its application?

First of all, we need to pay particular attention to the “**un-holy indifference**” of the rich man, and the **consequences he brought upon himself** in the afterlife.

Here, let’s shift focus for a moment and consider an **encounter** between a **religious lawyer** and **Jesus** in **Matthew’s Gospel** because it will help us understand the parable better:

*...one of [the Pharisees], a lawyer, asked him a question, to test him. “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?” And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets.”* (Mt 22:35-40)

The **root sin** of the rich man was **getting things backwards**. Instead of being indifferent to *material and physical pleasures* so that he could love **God** and **neighbor**, he became indifferent to *God* and *neighbor* so that he could indulge in **material** and **physical** pleasures.

Listen to how Jesus starts his story:

*There was a rich man who dressed in purple garments and fine linen and dined sumptuously each day. And lying at his door was a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who would gladly have eaten his fill of the scraps that fell from the rich man's table.* (Lk 16:19-21)

Although Jesus doesn't go into much detail regarding the rich man's habits, it's not hard to imagine him as one of the **complacent people** in the **1<sup>st</sup> Reading**. The people the **Prophet Amos** confronted were so focused on themselves, that they were **indifferent to the point of blindness** to the suffering all around them. Listen to God's words through the mouth of the prophet:

*Woe to the complacent in Zion! Lying upon beds of ivory, stretched comfortably on their couches, they eat lambs taken from the flock, and calves from the stall!... They drink wine from bowls and anoint themselves with the best oils; yet they are not made ill by the collapse of Joseph!* (Am 1, 4, 6)

Gluttony...self-indulgence...entitlement...excess...and **no concern** about the **collapse of the good** around them. Whereas **suffering**—*accepted as a gift from God*— **tempers** the soul and makes it **stronger**—*pampering oneself* by indulging in the pleasures of this world **numbs** the soul and makes it **weaker**.

It also **kills the conscience!**

And then we have the most **frightening** part of the parable. **Even death could not change the rich man's attitude**. Consider his own words:

*“Father Abraham, have pity on me. Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am suffering torment in these flames.”* (Lk 16:24)

Here's *why* this is so frightening. Many people **gamble** with their **salvation**, convincing themselves that they can **defy** God's laws all their life and then **repent** right before they die. In other words, they are **banking on a deathbed conversion**.

The **first flaw in this plan** is that nobody can answer the question, "*When will I die?*" except for someone who commits **suicide**, in which case **conversion** is clearly **missing** from the calculation.

The more ominous flaw in the "**gambler's approach to eternity**" is the belief that a *wholesale change of attitude* just before death is even *possible*—that we are even *capable* of switching **from sinner to saint at a moment's notice**.

The **rich man** is a **perfect example** of this reality. He never saw Lazarus as **his equal** in human dignity while both were alive. Now, in the **afterlife**, he remains incapable seeing Lazarus any differently in **death** than he did in **life**.

The fact is, he never saw Lazarus as a **person**, but rather as a **nuisance** or **inconvenience** to be ignored in *this life*, and as a **servant of his desires** in the *next*. To his great horror, once he passed from this life to the next, none of the rich man's earthly comforts could quench the **burning anguish** of **permanent exile** from God, even though *God had consistently made this clear in the Holy Scriptures*.

When the rich man—now in **torment**—called out to Father Abraham for help, Abraham replied:

*...between us and you a great chasm is established to prevent anyone from crossing who might wish to go from our side to yours or from your side to ours.* (Lk 16:26)

The tendency of the spiritually blind—symbolized by the rich man—is to **attribute the establishment of the great chasm—this painful eternal separation from God that we call *Hell*—to God.**

But the **chasm** is a **consequence** of *human choice*, not of **God's cruelty**. God so respects our freedom to choose to love him and our neighbor...or **not** to do so...that he simply gives us what we **really** want...for **eternity**.

Breaking the parable down into **actions** and **consequences**, we see that *the rich man established the chasm* between himself and Lazarus by his **indifference**. He did **not** love his neighbor. He had the **means** to help the beggar, but he **chose not to**. Lazarus wasn't **his** problem, or so he convinced himself.

He probably thought, “**This guy wants to be here, or he wouldn't be. Why doesn't he go get a job? I've worked hard for what I've got, and I deserve to enjoy it. Lazarus is not my concern.**”

The rich man's indifference was a “**double whammy**” because, in refusing to even **acknowledge** Lazarus, he also **violated God's law** to love his fellow human being. He didn't love God enough to obey him and he didn't love Lazarus enough to even **notice** him...until it was too late!

So, we can see that *Hell is a human choice*, and that God simply **respects our free will** and **ratifies our choices**.

*If there were no Hell, God would be cruel.* [REPEAT] If you don't see how, then just put yourself in Lazarus' place and imagine what you would think of a **God who did not hold the rich man responsible** either in **this life** or the **afterlife** for his unholy indifference.

*God is love* (1 Jn 4:8) precisely because God is **just**.

The **rich man's injustice** toward God and his fellow human being **established the chasm** in this life. **God's justice** in the afterlife simply **confirmed the rich man's choices**. Our **free will**—and **God's total respect** for it—is what makes the chasm **uncrossable**. In other words, our eternal fate—Heaven or Hell—is **permanent**.

**St. Paul's** warning to the **Galatians** is particularly pertinent here:

*Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption; but he who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. And let us not grow weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we do not lose heart. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.* (Gal 6:7-10)

If we don't *want* to experience a **foretaste** Heaven now, by going to **Mass**, **praying** every day, and **Confessing** our sins frequently, then we won't taste anything but the **bitterness of our indifference** toward God...for eternity.

If we don't return a portion of the material gifts that God has given us **now**—out of gratitude for his generosity to **us poor beggars**—then we won't magically **start** to appreciate him **after death**.

If we don't demonstrate our love for others—*beyond the circle of our family and friends*—by our actions **now**, then we won't start to care about them **after death**.

If we don't want Heaven **now**, we won't want it **later**.

**Bottom line:** Which side of the chasm **we** end up on is entirely up to **us**.