

**September 29, 2019 St. Vincent de Paul and “Lazarus” Homily:** On September twenty-seventh, the Church celebrated the feast of Saint Vincent De Paul, one of the outstanding clerics of the seventeenth century. Known widely as the Apostle of Charity, Vincent devoted his priestly life in his native country to the care of the poor. In his day the Queen consort of France referred to him as “the Conscience of France”. Shortly after World War II an award winning motion picture based on the life of Vincent was released in France, and later distributed to countries around the globe. Widely praised by critics, it was the first foreign film to earn an Academy Award, and deservedly so. In one dramatic scene, Vincent brings a young orphan to some wealthy friends seeking to find a permanent home for her. Having lost her mother to the plague that ravaged France, Vincent proved to be most solicitous for the youth’s welfare... Alas, all his friends refused to honor his request. Their excuse was a fear of contagion. The young girl may be a carrier of the disease. But the more obvious reason was that having a peasant girl in their home would be considered scandalous and might jeopardize their social standing in Parisian society. The doors of the wealthy were closed to a poor orphan. Vincent was crestfallen.

Our Lord’s parable of the rich man and Lazarus is well known by most Christians. The point of the parable is simple enough. A fabulously wealthy man is insensitive to the suffering of a poor man at the entrance of his home. But there is another figure to consider, the Patriarch Abraham, who plays a key part in the often told story. According to one Jewish scholar, Amy Devine, one of the dominant characteristics of Abraham is his hospitality. In the eighteenth chapter of the Book of Genesis, we read, “As Abraham was sitting at the opening of his tent in the heat of the day he looked up and saw three men standing in front of him. When he saw them he ran from the opening of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground. “Sirs’, he said, ‘if I have deserved your favor, do not pass by my humble self without a visit. Let me send for some water so that you may wash your feet and rest under a tree; and let me fetch a little food so that you may refresh yourselves” (Gen 1:2-5). Unlike the rich man in today’s parable, Abraham welcomed strangers to dine with him. He opened the door of his home to them. The rich man was not a true child of Abraham in that he did not follow the exemplary example of the great Patriarch.

Nor would he have been a true disciple of Jesus, who said, “For I was hungry and you gave me no food; I was thirsty and you gave me no drink; a stranger and you gave me no welcome”. (Mt.25: 42-43) The rich man was clearly indifferent to the demands of the Law of Moses, God’s revealed word. He failed to follow the path that God had laid out for him in order to attain life. Indeed, in the Talmud, there is a word of warning to the rich for their wicked behavior. “Whoever turns his eyes from one who appeals for charity is considered as if he were serving idols.” Before God, the poor man is not a number. Nor is he nameless. The name Lazarus means, “God is my help”. God does not forget those who are forgotten by all; those who are worthless in the eyes of the self indulgent rich are precious in the Lord’s sight.

Can you recall the last time you turned your back on someone who needed your help?

We do something great and admirable when we give a most courteous welcome to all in need, especially the outcasts of society, or people of humble condition, so-called “deplorables” today.

Do we recognize Lazarus in our midst? Are we oblivious to his loneliness, his wretched life and the utter indifference of his wealthy neighbor? Do we see in him Our Blessed Lord in disguise?

In the Canticle of Our Blessed Mother, we hear the words of a prophet. "He has filled the hungry with good things and the rich he has sent away empty". (Lk.1:53)

In seventeenth century France, the wealthy refused the request of a future saint to open the gates of their estates and welcome an orphan girl into their homes. In the twenty-first century, we need to open our doors to all those in need. But we must first have the good sense to recognize Lazarus in our midst, who is begging for our attention and, what's more, our help.

Amen!