



Daily Reflections

March 21, 2019

Scripture

Luke 16: 19-31

Jesus said to the Pharisees:

"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.

Dogs even used to come and lick his sores.

When the poor man died,

he was carried away by angels to the bosom of Abraham.

The rich man also died and was buried, and from the netherworld, where he was in torment, he raised his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side.

And he cried out, '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.'

Abraham replied, 'My child,

remember that you received what was good during your lifetime while Lazarus likewise received what was bad;

but now he is comforted here, whereas you are tormented.

Moreover, 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.'
He said, 'Then I beg you, father, send him
to my father's house,
for I have five brothers, so that he may warn them,
lest they too come to this place of torment.'
But Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the prophets.
Let them listen to them.'
He said, 'Oh no, father Abraham,
but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.'
Then Abraham said,
'If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets,
neither will they be persuaded
if someone should rise from the dead.'"

Our Scripture Reflection

Luke uses a number of key themes to organize the traditions he has received from eyewitnesses in order to teach us about Jesus. In today's Gospel reading he employs the theme of "Divine Reversal." The Divine Reversal is Jesus' way of showing us that situations of injustice that exist in this life will be radically reversed in the Kingdom to come. We were first introduced to this theme in Mary's prayer in Luke 1: 53..."The hungry He has filled with every good thing while the rich He has sent away empty." This theme is illustrated in the radical reversal that takes place in the lives of both the rich man and the poor beggar Lazarus. The rich man who enjoyed luxury during his life ended up in eternal misery while the suffering beggar ends up enjoying Paradise. The message: Get your life in proper order today!

Food for your Journey

Dogs in the Biblical and rabbinic traditions are almost as unclean as pigs. Both the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures are clear witnesses to this. Dogs are kept as guard dogs (Isaiah 56:10), never as pets. Only those who feed them dare approach them. A rich man needs such dogs because they are his "home security system." The story assumes that the guard dogs are fed the scraps Lazarus longs to eat (cf. Matthew 15:27). Lazarus goes hungry. The dogs are fed.

Yet, those wild guard dogs, whom no one but their handlers dare approach, realize that the weak, sick man by the gate is their friend. They lick his wounds. The saliva of a dog's mouth is sterile. The ancients discovered that when a dog licks a person's sores or wounds, healing occurs more rapidly. Archeologists in Aschelon, Israel, have recently uncovered a center where 1,300 dogs are buried in individual plots. The site has been identified as a Phoenician semi-religious center where the sick could go, pay a fee and have trained dogs lick their wounds as medical treatment. In this parable the master refuses to help the poor sick man outside his gate -- but his wild guard dogs will do what they can. They will lick his wounds. Their master will not help Lazarus. They will. Lazarus' quiet gentle spirit breaks through their violent hostility to humans and they care for him knowing that he cares for them.

--Kenneth Bailey

A Prayer from the Heart

Dear God, As I read Your Holy Word, help me to understand and practice the lessons You teach me. May I remove every selfish tendency that exists in my heart. May I show my gratitude for every good thing You have given me by sharing my gifts with others, especially the least in Your Kingdom. Amen