

“FIRST IMPRESSIONS”

26th SUNDAY -C- SEPTEMBER 28, 2025

Amos 6: 1, 4-7; Psalm 146; I Timothy 6: 11-16; Luke 16: 19-31

By: **Jude Siciliano**, OP

Dear Preachers:

Today's parable of the rich man and the beggar Lazarus reminds us that the poor who need our help are not far away or out of sight. They are not just newspaper stories or snippets from television news. Like Lazarus—whose name in Hebrew means “God has helped”—they are right at our doorsteps. And like the rich man, we cannot help but see them, for we pass them each day in our comings and goings.

This parable highlights one of Luke's great concerns: the poor and the call to social justice. Again and again in his gospel, Luke raises the question of money and possessions. Jesus' parents were poor—when they brought him to the Temple, they offered the sacrifice of the poor, a turtledove (2:22-24). Jesus warned repeatedly of the dangers of wealth (6:20-26). Recall the parable of the rich man with his bountiful harvest who built bigger barns to store his goods; God calls him a fool (12:16-21). Today's parable of the rich man and Lazarus brings Luke's teaching on money to a climax.

Notice a subtle but important point: Lazarus is the only character in all of Jesus' parables who is given a name. He is not “some poor man,” or “the beggar at the gate.” He is Lazarus! It is as if Jesus is saying: “Get close enough to the poor to know their names. Don't look at them from a distance and simply feel sorry for them.” Our response must go beyond writing an occasional check for “the needy poor.”

The parable brims with contrasts. The rich man is clothed in purple garments and fine linens—symbols of luxury. Lazarus is “clothed” in sores. The rich man feasts every day; Lazarus longs for scraps from his table. The rich man is buried with dignity; Lazarus is carried away by angels. With all his money, the rich man could never afford that!

This is not a quaint ancient tale. The gap between rich and poor continues to widen, creating injustice and instability in our world. A small percentage of the world's population controls enormous wealth. Oxfam reports that the wealthiest 1% own more than billions of people at the bottom. Meanwhile, inflation eats away at wages as families struggle to pay for housing, healthcare, and education.

The parable also speaks of inequality among nations. Developing countries are overburdened with debt while wealthy nations control resources. Inequality breeds resentment and division across the globe.

Pope Francis warns about this in strong terms. He speaks of the “globalization of indifference,” in which prosperity dulls compassion, leaving the marginalized unseen and unheard—Lazarus at the gate, ignored daily by the man in purple garments. For the Pope, addressing inequality is not optional charity; it is a moral obligation, especially for Christians.

From the netherworld, the rich man calls out to Abraham for help. Notice: he knows Lazarus by name! He had seen him daily yet ignored him. Even in torment, the rich man remains arrogant, asking Abraham to command Lazarus to serve him. He still treats him as someone to order around. Abraham makes clear: the rich man is not there because of bad luck. He is there because he failed to act with compassion. His indifference put him where he is.

So, what are we to do? Some may give up possessions and go to distant lands to serve the poor. But the parable reminds us that the needy are as near as our own doorstep, our workplace, our schools, our homes. Who are the outsiders we need to welcome into our circle? Who around us bears the “sores” of past injury or neglect? Can our words and care bring healing to them?

The parable speaks of a great chasm between the rich man and Lazarus—a chasm not of geography but of relationship. Lazarus could not cross it; only the rich man could. He had the power to bridge the distance with compassion, but he chose not to.

And so, we ask: Where is Lazarus today? He is in the evening news, on YouTube, in the headlines:

- In Gaza, over 500,000 face starvation.
- In Sudan, civil war has left more than 150,000 dead, with millions enduring what some call the “largest global hunger crisis.”
- Famines persist in Yemen, Haiti, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, and beyond.
- Many of these crises are under-reported and underfunded. The world needs urgent, coordinated action.

This parable is anything but outdated. Lazarus is still at our door, waiting to be seen and helped. If we ignore him, we risk the same fate as the rich man.

Click here for a link to this Sunday's readings:
<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/092825.cfm>

QUOTABLE

The native does not have superior rights over the immigrant. Before God all are equal; the earth was given by God to all. When a person cannot achieve a meaningful life in his or her own land, that person has the right to move.

----US Conference of Catholic Bishops

JUSTICE BULLETIN BOARD

Woe to the complacent in Zion!—Amos 6: 1

Blessed is he who keeps faith forever, secures justice for the oppressed, gives food to the hungry—Psalms 146: 7

Last week I wrote about how the prophets would criticize or energize people in order to persuade them to once again turn toward God and God's covenant with them. The two quotes above from today's readings continue that tradition. I am not so sure that these two methods have really worked all that well after 2000+ years. Catholic guilt only goes so far, and the world seems to have far more interesting enticements to excite people. This begs the question, what strategy would a modern-day prophet use?

The appeal to conscience probably still has the biggest draw. Pope John XXIII said so in *Pacem in Terris* when he wrote, "The Creator of the World has imprinted in man's heart an order which his conscience reveals to him and enjoins him to obey." Conscience has a biblical foundation. Though the term does not appear in Jewish scriptures, the writings do say a lot about heart. The heart in Jewish understanding is the core of the human being in which each person is most uniquely oneself and face to face with God. The gospels continue this understanding where the Semitic term "heart" is synonymous

with conscience. Let us look at some of the statements from modern-day prophets:

“If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other.”—Mother Teresa

“The greatest challenge in our day is to bring about a revolution of the heart, a revolution which has to start within each one of us.”—Dorothy Day

“Beautiful is the moment in which we understand that we are no more than an instrument of God; we live only as long as God wants us to live; we can only do as much as God makes us able to do; we are only as intelligent as God would have us be.”—Archbishop Oscar A. Romero, from his last homily, 1980

Conscience calls on a person to be authentic especially to his/her deepest instincts for the good. Here you find interior motivation, not someone or something telling you what to do. A modern-day prophet would encourage us to reflect on what it means for our lives to have meaning, to come and see with our hearts the wider world and those suffering in it. Reflect. Come and see. You can come and see at: socialconcern@hnojcathedral.org

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FAITH BOOK

Mini-reflections on the Sunday scripture readings designed for persons on the run. “Faith Book” is also brief enough to be posted in the Sunday parish bulletins people take home.

From today’s Gospel reading:

Jesus said to the Pharisees:
“There was a rich man who dressed in purple garments
and fine linens
and dined sumptuously each day.”

Reflection:

Luke advises us to be cautious about our possession; each of us has to discern how we are to use them wisely in service to the kingdom of God. We

are reminded that an emphasis on possessions neglects what the Scriptures teach and will only lead to disappointment and separation from God.

So, we ask ourselves:

- Who are the neediest people in my surroundings?
- What among my possessions do I no longer need and should give to the

POSTCARDS TO DEATH ROW INMATES

“One has to strongly affirm that condemnation to the death penalty is an inhuman measure that humiliates personal dignity, in whatever form it is carried out.”

---Pope Francis

Inmates on death row are the most forgotten people in the prison system. Each week I am posting in this space several inmates' names and locations. I invite you to write a postcard to one or more of them to let them know that: we have not forgotten them; are praying for them and their families; or whatever personal encouragement you might like to give them. *If the inmate responds, you might consider becoming pen pals.*

Please write to:

- Erroll Moses #0552017 (On death row since 11/18/1997)
- Michael Braxton #0043529 (11/21/1997)
- Jimmie Lawrence #0597164 (12/11/1997)

----Central Prison P.O. 247 Phoenix, MD 21131

Please note: **Central Prison** is in Raleigh, NC., but for security purposes, mail to inmates is processed through a clearing house at the above address in Maryland.

For more information on the Catholic position on the death penalty go to the Catholic Mobilizing Network: <http://catholicsmobilizing.org/resources/cacp/>

On this page you can sign “The National Catholic Pledge to End the Death Penalty.” Also, check the interfaith page for People of Faith Against the Death Penalty: <http://www.pfadp.org/>

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2. "VOLUME 2" is an opportunity for you to hear from the readers of First Impressions. These reflections also follow the Liturgical Calendar and appear here about mid-week each week. They are written by various guest authors.

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