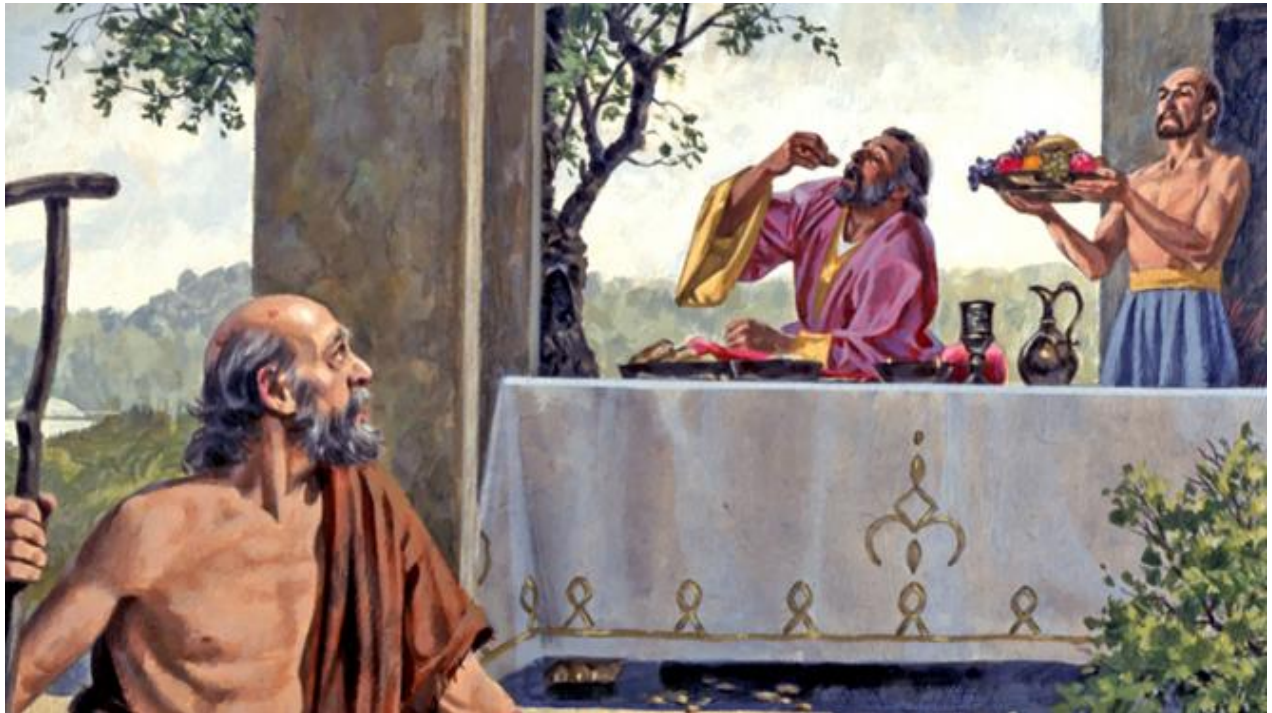




The Newsletter of the Catholic Commission for Social Justice Issue 23, February 2017

Pope Francis' 2017 Lenten Message

Theme: *"The Word is a gift. Other persons are a gift".*



"At the basis of everything is the word of God, which during this season we are invited to hear and ponder more deeply. I would now like to consider the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (cf. Lk 16:19-31). Let us find inspiration in this meaningful story, for it provides a key to understanding what we need to do in order to attain true happiness and eternal life. It exhorts us to sincere conversion... When we close our heart to the gift of God's word, we end up closing our heart to the gift of our brothers and sisters." Pope Francis Lenten Message 2017

Introduction by Leela Ramdeen, Chair, CCSJ: CCSJ is pleased to share with you Pope Francis' 2017 Lenten Message on the theme: *"The Word is a gift. Other persons are a gift"*. The message has three sections: The other person is a gift; Sin blinds us; The Word is a gift.

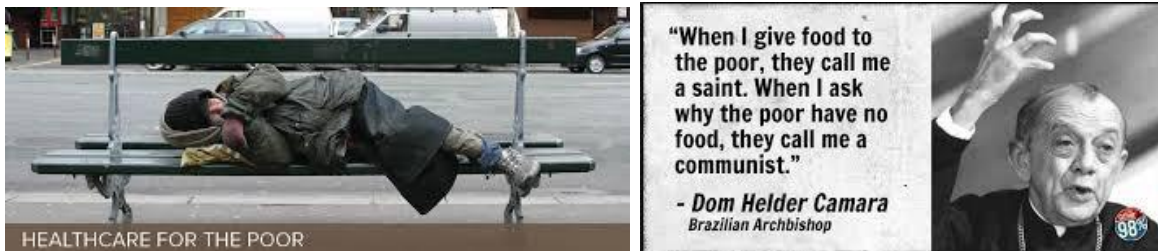
The Holy Father bases his theme on the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). He says the parable "provides a key to understanding what we need to do in order to attain true happiness and eternal life." Here are some of the key statements he makes in his message:

"Lent is a new beginning, a path leading to the certain goal of Easter, Christ's victory over death. This season urgently calls us to conversion.

"Lent is a favourable season for deepening our spiritual life through the means of sanctification offered us by the Church: fasting, prayer and almsgiving. At the basis of everything is the word of God, which during this season we are invited to hear and ponder more deeply." Lent is "a favourable time to renew ourselves in the encounter with the living Christ in his Word, in the sacraments and in others."

"Let us find inspiration in this meaningful story (the rich man and Lazarus), for it provides a key to understanding what we need to do in order to attain true happiness and eternal life. It exhorts us to sincere conversion... Lazarus teaches us that other persons are a gift. A right relationship with people consists in gratefully recognizing their value. Even the poor person at the door of the rich is not a nuisance, but a summons to conversion and to change."

"Lent is a favourable season for opening the doors to all those in need and recognizing in them the face of Christ. Each of us meets people like this every day. Each life that we encounter is a gift deserving acceptance, respect and love. The word of God helps us to open our eyes to welcome and love life, especially when it is weak and vulnerable. But in order to do this, we have to take seriously what the Gospel tells us about the rich man."



Pope Francis reminds us of St Paul's warning that love of money "is the root of all evils" it is also "the main cause of corruption and a source of envy, strife and suspicion... At the root of all his (the rich man's) ills was the failure to heed God's word. As a result, he no longer loved God and grew to despise his neighbour... Money can come to dominate us even to the point of becoming a tyrannical idol instead of being an instrument at our service for doing good and showing solidarity towards others, money can chain us and the entire world to a selfish logic that leaves no room for love and hinders peace." He says that in the rich man's life "there was no place for God... His only god was himself." Consider this statement in light of TT's drop on the Corruption Perception Index and the yawning gap between the rich and poor in TT/the world.

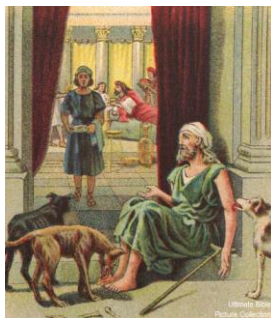
Let me make it clear that the Church does not say that individuals/people should not seek to make money. However, we must not let 'money' become our 'God'. He rightly says that the desire for wealth can become a "tyrannical idol" that blinds us from the needs of our neighbours. Remember that all of us have responsibility for each other; to build the common good; to work towards the well-being of our neighbour.

He says: "The rich man's greed makes him vain...His personality finds expression in appearances, in showing others what he can do. But his appearance masks an interior emptiness. His life is a prisoner to outward appearances, to the most superficial and fleeting aspects of existence...The lowest rung of this moral degradation is pride...The rich man dresses like a king and acts like a god, forgetting that he is merely mortal. For those corrupted by love of riches, nothing exists beyond their own ego. Those around them do not come into their line of sight. The result of attachment to money is a sort of blindness. The rich man does not see the poor man who is starving, hurting, lying at his door."

In a world in which individualism, selfishness, and moral relativism are rampant, Pope Francis has a right to ask us to 'check' ourselves. As Fr Gerard Tang Choon said at CREDI's recent Graduation, "Remember, it's not about 'you'." When we become egotistical, we forget that we are here to work in God's vineyard; to serve Him by serving our brothers and sisters, each of whom is made in His image and likeness.

The Holy Father concluded by saying: "Let us pray for one another so that, by sharing in the victory of Christ, we may open our doors to the weak and poor. Then we will be able to experience and share to the full the joy of Easter." CCSJ invites you to act on the Holy Father's plea to us to mark Lent, through fasting, prayer and almsgiving; to use the season to serve others; and to participate in the various Lenten activities/campaigns in our parishes in the Archdiocese and further afield.

Niall Cooper, Director of Church Action on Poverty, UK, rightly reminds us that we should ask ourselves: "So what are we to make of the parable of Lazarus and the rich man as applied to today? Where do we place ourselves in the story of Lazarus and the rich man? And what will it take to convince us as a society to share our wealth more equitably? Where would we find Lazarus today? And where would we look for the modern day equivalents of the rich man? What would the world look like if we valued each person as being of equal worth? Or to ask the question the other way round: Why do we find it so hard to value people equally?... As the rich man was judged by his treatment of the poor man, the outsider, the non-person at his gate, so too will we... Our task as Christians is to live as if another world is possible – a world in which all are equally valued – and through our actions to help to bring this world into being."



WITH MODERN WEAPONS, TARGETS CAN BE PINPOINTED WITH DEADLY ACCURACY. IF ONLY WE COULD REACH OUT COMPASSIONATELY TO THE POOR, THE HUNGRY AND THE HOMELESS WITH THAT SAME PRECISION!

MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS FOR LENT 2017

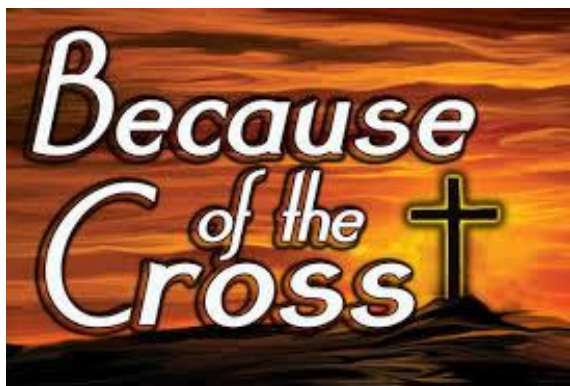
"The Word is a gift. Other persons are a gift"

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Lent is a new beginning, a path leading to the certain goal of Easter, Christ's victory over death. This season urgently calls us to conversion. Christians are asked to return to God "with all their hearts" (*Joel 2:12*), to refuse to settle for mediocrity and to grow in friendship with the Lord. Jesus is the faithful friend who never abandons us. Even when we sin, he patiently awaits our return; by that patient expectation, he shows us his readiness to forgive (cf. *Homily, 8 January 2016*).



Lent is a favourable season for deepening our spiritual life through the means of sanctification offered us by the Church: fasting, prayer and almsgiving. At the basis of everything is the word of God, which during this season we are invited to hear and ponder more deeply. I would now like to consider the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (cf. *Lk 16:19-31*). Let us find inspiration in this meaningful story, for it provides a key to understanding what we need to do in order to attain true happiness and eternal life. It exhorts us to sincere conversion.



Even the loudest shout or a quiet sob, GOD can hear a silent prayer from a sincere heart.





1. The other person is a gift

The parable begins by presenting its two main characters. The poor man is described in greater detail: he is wretched and lacks the strength even to stand. Lying before the door of the rich man, he fed on the crumbs falling from his table. His body is full of sores and dogs come to lick his wounds (cf. vv. 20-21). The picture is one of great misery; it portrays a man disgraced and pitiful.

The scene is even more dramatic if we consider that the poor man is called *Lazarus*: a name full of promise, which literally means *God helps*. This character is not anonymous. His features are clearly delineated and he appears as an individual with his own story. While practically invisible to the rich man, we see and know him as someone familiar. He becomes a face, and as such, a gift, a priceless treasure, a human being whom God loves and cares for, despite his concrete condition as an outcast (cf. [*Homily, 8 January 2016*](#)).



“LET TODAY BE THE DAY YOU GIVE UP WHO YOU’VE BEEN FOR WHO YOU CAN BECOME.”

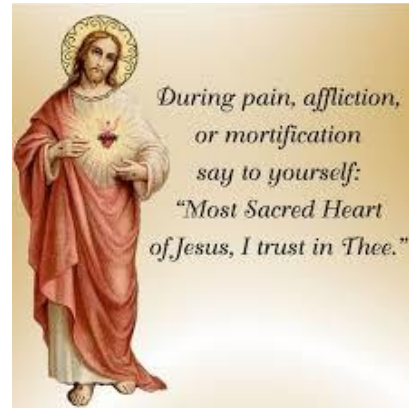
Lazarus teaches us that *other persons are a gift*. A right relationship with people consists in gratefully recognizing their value. Even the poor person at the door of the rich is not a nuisance, but a summons to conversion and to change. The parable first invites us to open the doors of our heart to others because each person is a gift,

whether it be our neighbour or an anonymous pauper. Lent is a favourable season for opening the doors to all those in need and recognizing in them the face of Christ. Each of us meets people like this every day. Each life that we encounter is a gift deserving acceptance, respect and love. The word of God helps us to open our eyes to welcome and love life, especially when it is weak and vulnerable. But in order to do this, we have to take seriously what the Gospel tells us about the rich man.

Lord, let
them see You
in me.

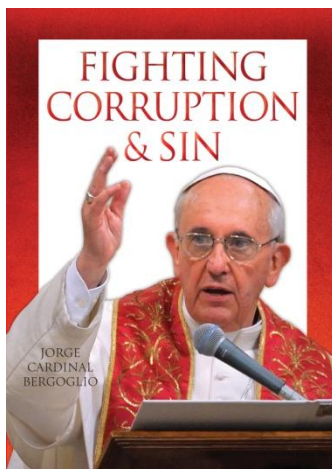
"LET US HOLD FAST THE
PROFESSION OF OUR FAITH
WITHOUT WAVERING; (FOR HE
IS FAITHFUL THAT PROMISED;) AND
LET US CONSIDER ONE
ANOTHER TO PROVOKE UNTO
LOVE AND TO GOOD WORKS:"
HEBREWS 10:23-24.

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2. Sin blinds us

The parable is unsparing in its description of the contradictions associated with the rich man (cf. v. 19). Unlike poor Lazarus, he does not have a name; he is simply called “a rich man”. His opulence was seen in his extravagant and expensive robes. Purple cloth was even more precious than silver and gold, and was thus reserved to divinities (cf. *Jer* 10:9) and kings (cf. *Jg* 8:26), while fine linen gave one an almost sacred character. The man was clearly ostentatious about his wealth, and in the habit of displaying it daily: “He feasted sumptuously every day” (v. 19). In him we can catch a dramatic glimpse of the corruption of sin, which progresses in three successive stages: love of money, vanity and pride (cf. *Homily, 20 September 2013*).



JUST AS THE
BODY IS DEAD
WITHOUT BREATH,
SO ALSO FAITH IS
DEAD WITHOUT
GOOD WORKS.
JAMES 2:26

Do not ask God
to guide your
footsteps...
If you're not willing
to move your feet.

The Apostle Paul tells us that “the love of money is the root of all evils” (*1 Tim* 6:10). It is the main cause of corruption and a source of envy, strife and suspicion. Money can come to dominate us, even to the point of becoming a tyrannical idol (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 55). Instead of being an instrument at our service for doing good and showing solidarity towards others, money can chain us and the entire world to a selfish logic that leaves no room for love and hinders peace.



The parable then shows that the rich man’s greed makes him vain. His personality finds expression in appearances, in showing others what he can do. But his appearance masks an interior emptiness. His life is a prisoner to outward appearances, to the most superficial and fleeting aspects of existence (cf. *ibid.*, 62).

The lowest rung of this moral degradation is pride. The rich man dresses like a king and acts like a god, forgetting that he is merely mortal. For those corrupted by love of riches, nothing exists beyond their own ego. Those around them do not come into their line of sight. The result of attachment to money is a sort of blindness. The rich man does not see the poor man who is starving, hurting, lying at his door.



Looking at this character, we can understand why the Gospel so bluntly condemns the love of money: “No one can be the slave of two masters: he will either hate the first and love the second, or be attached to the first and despise the second. You cannot be the slave both of God and of money” (*Mt 6:24*).

Enjoy Greater Abundance by
Sharing Your Time and Money



3. The Word is a gift

The Gospel of the rich man and Lazarus helps us to make a good preparation for the approach of Easter. The liturgy of Ash Wednesday invites us to an experience quite similar to that of the rich man. When the priest imposes the ashes on our heads, he repeats the words: “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return”. As it turned out, the rich man and the poor man both died, and the greater part of the parable takes place in the afterlife. The two characters suddenly discover that “we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it” (*1 Tim 6:7*).

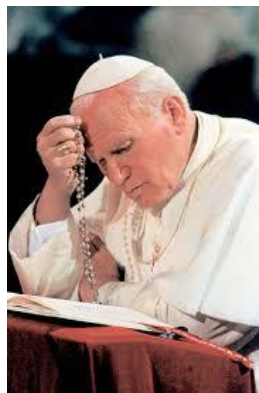
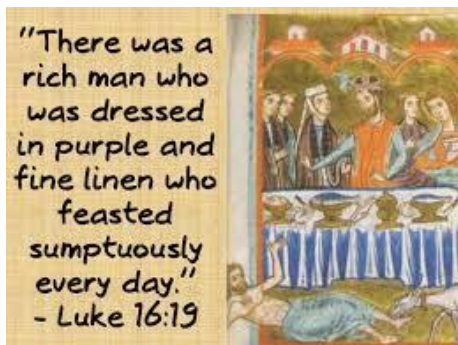


We too see what happens in the afterlife. There the rich man speaks at length with Abraham, whom he calls “father” (Lk 16:24.27), as a sign that he belongs to God’s people. This detail makes his life appear all the more contradictory, for until this moment there had been no mention of his relation to God. In fact, there was no place for God in his life. His only god was himself.

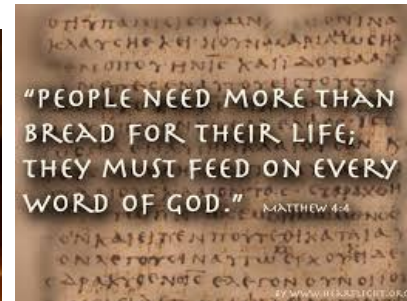
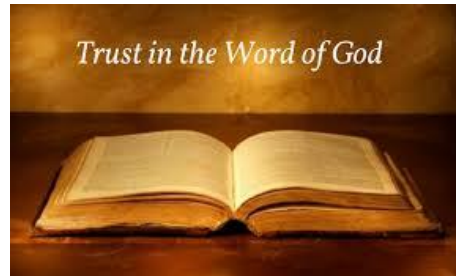


The rich man recognizes Lazarus only amid the torments of the afterlife. He wants the poor man to alleviate his suffering with a drop of water. What he asks of Lazarus is similar to what he could have done but never did. Abraham tells him: “During your life you had your fill of good things, just as Lazarus had his fill of bad. Now he is being comforted here while you are in agony” (v. 25). In the afterlife, a kind of fairness is restored and life’s evils are balanced by good.

The parable goes on to offer a message for all Christians. The rich man asks Abraham to send Lazarus to warn his brothers, who are still alive. But Abraham answers: “They have Moses and the prophets, let them listen to them” (v. 29). Countering the rich man’s objections, he adds: “If they will not listen either to Moses or to the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone should rise from the dead” (v. 31).



The rich man's real problem thus comes to the fore. At the root of all his ills was *the failure to heed God's word*. As a result, he no longer loved God and grew to despise his neighbour. The word of God is alive and powerful, capable of converting hearts and leading them back to God. When we close our heart to the gift of God's word, we end up closing our heart to the gift of our brothers and sisters.

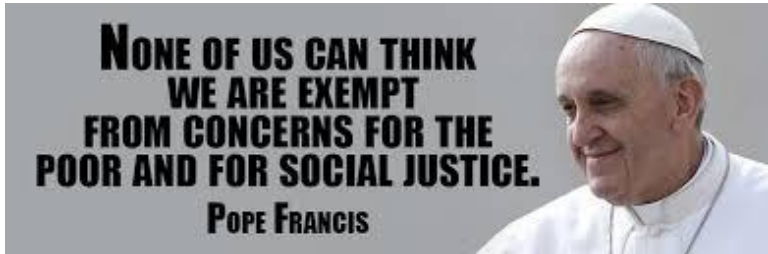


Dear friends, Lent is the favourable season for renewing our encounter with Christ, living in his word, in the sacraments and in our neighbour. The Lord, who overcame the deceptions of the Tempter during the forty days in the desert, shows us the path we must take. May the Holy Spirit lead us on a true journey of conversion, so that we can rediscover the gift of God's word, be purified of the sin that blinds us, and serve Christ present in our brothers and sisters in need.



I encourage all the faithful to express this spiritual renewal also by sharing in the Lenten Campaigns promoted by many Church organizations in different parts of the world, and thus to favour the culture of encounter in our one human family. Let us pray for one another so that, by sharing in the victory of Christ, we may open our doors to the weak and poor. Then we will be able to experience and share to the full the joy of Easter. *From the Vatican, 18 October 2016* **FRANCIS**

"As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace."
1 Peter 4:10
www.PitablaQuotes.net



2 Chronicles 7:14 (NKJV)
14. if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

PRAY AND ACT



"PEOPLE WILL FORGET WHAT YOU SAID, PEOPLE WILL FORGET WHAT YOU DID, BUT PEOPLE WILL NEVER FORGET HOW YOU MADE THEM FEEL."
- MAYA ANGELOU



Life's most persistent and urgent question is, What are you doing for others?
- Martin Luther King, Jr.



THE PARABLE OF
THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS



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