

“Self-sufficiency makes the God experience impossible.”

The 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time - Cycle C

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



Dcn. Frank Sila
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Good morning. The Gospel that we heard today was quite radical for its time. The cultural belief was that wealth and prosperity was a sign of God's love and favor. On the other hand, it was thought that God was punishing Lazarus with poverty and illness, for his sins and the sins of his father. It was a simplistic view of man's relationship to God. Then the parable takes a nasty turn where Lazarus is with Abraham and the Rich Man is in the torment of the netherworld. This would have shaken the worldview of those listening to the story.

Jesus is pressing his listeners, and us today, to go a bit deeper. The problem with wealth and our technology is that it can lead to a feeling of self-sufficiency where we mistakenly believe we have no need of God. Lazarus depended upon God each day for food and shelter. Lazarus was in relationship to God where the Rich Man was preoccupied. To be in relationship means opening oneself to the possibility of hope, change and transformation.

So, like the Rich Man, when we get all puffed and full of ourselves, we do not see as God sees. We do not see the hurting and marginalized and Lazarus goes hungry once again. "Self-sufficiency makes the God experience impossible." Rohr

My good friend, Msgr. Bill Fitzgerald, nurtured his relationship to God by starting and ending his day in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. When he lived over on South Street, he saw many street people at his door. If Fitz did not invite them in for soup and a sandwich, he at least spent a minute or two getting to know them. The unknown caller at the door was always important for him. While at St. Clare House in Battle Creek, Fitz sustained a back injury. Dressing and undressing was very painful and time consuming. One evening he had only been in bed thirty minutes or so when the doorbell rang.

The woman at the door explained to Fitz's caregiver that she had been ringing the doorbell at the rectory for some time with no answer. She went on saying that she was having surgery early the next morning and would like to receive the Sacraments. Fitz, hearing this, dressed himself and anointed his caller. Fitz never complained about the hour that God chose to send someone his way. He just tried to love them as he thought God would. Two days later Fitz's MRI confirmed he had broken several vertebrae. He had managed to see through his pain to recognize Lazarus at the door.

One of our deacons recently went home to God. Bernie had suffered from MS for over 10 years. Paralyzed from the neck down he spent most of the last four years of his life in bed. When I saw him in the hospital, he was actively dying. He drifted in and out of consciousness, as if having one foot in this world and one in the next. In a moment of awareness, Bernie opened his eyes and described seeing his mother and Msgr. Fitz welcoming him.

I am not sure where St. Peter was, but I had to smile at the notion of 'knocking on heaven's door' and having Fitz answer. And yet, that was Fitz; doing what he has done all his life, loving and greeting God's people.

Shortly after I saw Bernie, he rallied briefly and asked to be transferred back to the VA hospital where he had been the last 5 years. It was there that he wanted to die. In his last hours, he called his aides and caregivers to his bedside and blessed them. These were the people that over the years, had bathed, dressed and fed him. With his blessing, they left with tears flowing, knowing that they would miss this kind and gentle man. Like Lazarus, Bernie allowed his infirmity and dependence on God to form his heart.

Both Msgr. Fitz and Deacon Bernie, avoided the distractions of life. They opened themselves to be influenced and changed through the Spirit. They pursued the, “...righteousness, devotion, faith, love, patience and gentleness” that St. Paul speaks of in our reading. Fitz and Bernie may never be canonized, but to all who have known them, they were everyday saints.

God calls us to the same. It requires no special knowledge, no secret handshake, just an acknowledgement of God’s presence and a willingness to answer the door.

The Prophet Amos accuses Zion of providing its own accompaniment. I cannot help but wonder if our world has not done the same. Sometimes it takes an oak tree changing colors or a brilliant sunrise to remind us of the Sacred Mystery we call life.

In this Eucharist, Jesus invites us to enter into that mystery with him.

Bibliography

All scripture quotations are taken from;. (1987). *The New American Bible, Revised edition*. USCCB.

Rohr, R. (2016). *The Divine Dance: The Trinity and Your Transformation*.

Note: The cover photo is a picture of the chapel at South Street where Msgr. Fitzgerald would often sit before the Blessed Sacrament for morning and evening prayer.