

26th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Sept. 28 31 & 29, 2013

All Saints Church
Kathy Meus

Lazarus at Our Door: Catechetical Sunday

As you listen to this parable of the rich man and Lazarus, I invite you to also listen for a word or phrase that stands out for you.

Our first reading from the prophet Amos, and the story we just heard of the rich man and Lazarus, are both scripture selections that speak to us about Catholic social teaching. The words of both Amos and Jesus are not to be taken lightly.

Last weekend, in his homily, Fr. Fred shared with us some of the highlights on Pope Francis' interview, found in America magazine, and some insights about the prophet Amos. As he was telling us about Amos, I got a little nervous....I was listening and hoping he wasn't going to share some of the thoughts I had already prepared for today, but that he would give us something to ponder.... If you were here last weekend, you know he did give us much to ponder, and very well, and he didn't use any of my thoughts about Amos!

So who was this guy Amos? He didn't just wake up one morning and decide he would become a prophet. He was content with his life as a shepherd and taking care of sycamore trees. He was an ordinary guy, and God seems to ask ordinary people to do extraordinary things. It was God who decided that Amos was to be a prophet and called Amos to speak the truth about the injustices that were taking place against the poor in the Northern Kingdom of Israel and also in Judea in the South...so Amos did as God commanded.

What Amos discovered was that the social injustice was rampant and the situation of the poor was in rapid decline, while the rich seemed oblivious to the situation. Sounds much like what is happening in our own country. Fr. Fred gave us some examples last week about the present day 1% in our country and the wealth they possess. It's not a secret that the middle class in our country is beginning to disappear. One fact that Fr. Fred did not share with us last week, is that last year in the United States, the top 10% wage earners, made 50% of all the income that was earned.

Amos warned his listeners that the luxuries they enjoyed were in jeopardy, not because their wealth was evil, but because they refused to see to the needs of the poor, and use their considerable resources to help the poor. The lovely furniture of the rich was not the object of the prophet's criticism, rather, it was the contrast between their "beds of ivory" and the pallets of straw upon which the poor took their rest.

The poor rarely ate meat, they had simple diets of bread and vegetables and occasionally a piece of fish. The rich ate and drank the very best and had the luxury of leisure time, while the poor worked hard to provide the immediate needs for their families.

When Jesus told the Pharisees the story of the rich man and Lazarus, he was renewing and reminding them of the words spoken by Amos some 700 years before any of them were born, and also reminding them of the words of other prophets before and after Amos.

Jesus named the poor man Lazarus, the only person in all of Jesus' parables that is given a name. Lazarus, which means, in whom God helps or saves....and in the end, God did save Lazarus. While on earth Lazarus yearned for the scraps of food from the rich man's table. Day after day Lazarus waited....but the rich man paid no attention. Jesus tells this story because daily the rich man went on living in luxury and ignored Lazarus.

The rich man stepped over and passed by Lazarus who was at his door and he even knew Lazarus by name when he begged for food. How do we know the rich man knew Lazarus' name? In the story we are told that when the rich man dies and is in torment, he calls out and asks Abraham to send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water to cool his tongue.

This story was not meant only for the Pharisees, it was also a message of importance for Jesus' disciples to hear. They were not permitted to live such a way of life, and allow such a way of life for the poor to exist. To do so would be to reject the kingdom of God which Jesus often spoke about. Lazarus was a brother in need and deserving of help.

Before the story of the rich man and Lazarus was read today, I invited you to listen for a word or phrase that stood out for you. I know it has been a few minutes since you were given that task, and perhaps some of you might have already forgotten the word or phrase. Reach into your stored memory, turn to one other person, and each of you share for 30 seconds, why that word or phrase got your attention.

I hope that was a good experience for you, I know it's not always easy for everyone to share their personal thoughts. However, what you just did, is one of the main parts of a parish RCIA session. At every session, those desiring to join our Catholic faith, and the RCIA team members who are present, are invited to listen for that particular word or phrase that is speaking to their heart, as the Sunday Gospel is re read. Then, just as you did, we share with another person our thoughts.

The word that caught my attention was the word "door". Lazarus would lay at the door of the rich man's house. The door was never opened for Lazarus. In keeping the door closed, the rich man missed the heart of the law embedded in the Laws of Moses found in the Book of Leviticus, that they were called "to love your neighbor as yourself". By keeping the door closed, the rich man remained closed to the words of Amos and the other prophets.....and in many places today the door is still closed, and Lazarus is still at the door.

Today she has a dirty face and unkempt hair and both she and her little brother whose hand she tightly clutches have swollen bellies from malnutrition. They live on the streets with their crack-addicted older sister.

Lazarus is at the door. He is 15 years old and has been swallowed up by New York City's sex industry because his parents sent him away from home when he came out as being gay.

Lazarus is at the door. They are illegal immigrants who have been treated unfairly, under paid because they have no green cards, and live in fear of being deported.

Lazarus is at the door. She is one of the many millions with no health care access. She must decide whether to buy medicine for her heart condition or food and clothing for her children.

Lazarus is at the door. The teenager sits in his bedroom reading the negative and degrading comments others have written on Facebook about him. Feeling discouraged and hopeless, he thinks that if this is what life will be like for him...why bother living anymore.

Every year the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops decides on a theme for parish and Diocesan Faith Formation leaders to work with as they develop programs and presentations. This year the theme is "Open the Door of Faith." What does this theme mean for us at All Saints? How can we as a parish "Open the Door of Faith?" How can each of us open that door?

At our baptism, we were anointed to be a prophet....I don't mean a prophet like Amos. I checked out the definition of the word "prophet" and was referred to the word advocate – a person who supports or speaks in favor of. Remembering that actions often speak louder than words, each of us is called to love God, our neighbor and ourselves. When we live such love, we become advocates and prophets...we speak and support the faith we embrace.

When we offer forgiveness and love instead of judgment and hatred, when we listen to the discouragement and loneliness of others and not ignore their feeling of hopelessness, when we are people of compassion and peace, and are eager to serve others, we are prophets....we Open the Door of Faith. Through our acts of kindness, love and encouragement, we open the door to the Lazarus' in our local community and worldwide.

Here at All Saints there are many opportunities for both children and adults to grow in their faith and relationship with the Lord. For our children there is Children's Liturgy of the Word at the 9:00 mass, a way for children to hear the Sunday readings in words they can understand and a chance to talk about the readings. Faith Formation classes during the school year, and Vacation Bible School during the summer, help the children to learn the foundations of our faith and how to live that faith. There is Sacramental preparation for our children who will receive First Communion, First Reconciliation, or Confirmation.

Adult opportunities that are offered throughout the year by our Adult Faith Enrichment Team include parish missions and retreats, Bible study, Advent and Lenten small faith sharing groups, book discussion, various speakers on a wide range of topics, and starting this Sunday between the masses our Adult Forum. There is preparation for those who desire to be married, for those who want their children baptized, and for those who are in our RCIA process.

There are many choices available for all of us at All Saints. The rich man had a choice with what to do, or not to do with his wealth. In choosing to keep his door closed everything that he had remained with him. We too have a choice. We can keep our door closed to the Lazarus' that are around us, and keep our wealth and our faith to ourselves...or we can choose to open our door and share our faith, our love and ourselves with those who pass our way.

Each Lazarus we meet constitutes a challenge to humanity, to the quality of our Christianity, and to the authenticity of our discipleship. Have we eyes to see, ears to hear, a heart to understand, and hands to help the Lazarus' whom God sends into your life and mine? Lazarus is at the door. Shall we tend to this person now, or like the rich man in the Gospel, shall we wait until it is too late? Pray that we make the right choice, the only choice....that we live our faith and we always open the door.

Amen.