

Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time “C” Cycle September 24-25, 2016

There is an old proverb stating: “if someone is asleep, he can be awakened, but if he is pretending to be asleep, he can never be awakened.” Some people, including us sometimes, have pretenses which are used to avoid situations like work, other duties and responsibilities, or even people that don’t like.

One of the pretenses which I hear from time to time from some Catholics who do not come to Sunday Mass regularly is that they are too busy! Allowing for some legitimate exceptions and at the risk of rash judging, for which I apologize, many use work, sports, family activities, or the like as pretenses for not coming to worship the Lord at Mass on his day.

Today’s Scriptures, especially the Old Testament reading and the Gospel, deal with pretenses, the pretenses of some rich people for ignoring the plight of the needy and poor. In the first reading, the prophet Amos castigates the uncaring wealthy people of his day, about 700 years before Christ, accusing them of self-indulgence and complacency in ignoring their fellow/sister Jews who are suffering especially those in the Northern Kingdom of Israel, who were defeated and brutalized by their Assyrian enemies.

In the Gospel selection, from Saint Luke, Jesus instructs the Pharisees by way of a parable of a rich man, often named Dives, (Latin for rich man) and a very poor beggar named Lazarus, who was covered by sores and lay each day by Dives’ door.

What is Dives’ sin which merits him punishment after he dies? Jesus doesn’t say that he was dishonest, or committed murder or adultery. He is not guilty because he is rich, but rather he was uncaring, pretending not to notice and give relief to a person, a fellow Jew, in dire need. His sin was not of commission, but of omission.

After each man dies, Dives and Lazarus have their situations reversed. Dives begs the patriarch Abraham to send Lazarus to bring him a cooling drop of water to relieve his suffering. Abraham, however, tells Dives that there is an unbridgeable chasm after death between the righteous and the damned.

Another request which Dives makes of Abraham is to send Lazarus to his five brothers to warn them about their pretenses. In reply, he is told that they have Moses and the prophets (the Scriptures) to teach and guide them to right living. When Dives persists, Abraham tells him that if his brothers will not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone should rise from the dead.

Jesus is making an obvious reference to his own future resurrection, which for some people, then and now, makes no difference in how they live and treat others.

Today's Scriptures should move us to reflect on our own pretenses and open our eyes and hearts to what our faith calls us to do. Are we mindful of the poor, the needy, the lonely, the alienated, even those within our own families, among our neighbors, and in the wider local community? Are we generous with our time in helping others, with our financial resources in supporting worthwhile charities?

Charity and compassion does begin at home, as we often hear, but they do not stop there. Like you, I receive many appeals to help many worthwhile charities. Obviously, we can't help everyone. I can and do help some, and if we all tried to do what we could, we would be more peaceful with ourselves and the world would be a better place.

We come to the Holy Eucharist today and every week to remember our blessings, to shed our pretenses, and to ask God's help for the days ahead when we might be in need. Amen.