

26TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, C

PLEASE CLOSE THE GAP

*“There was a rich man ... And at his gate there laid a poor man named Lazarus”
(Luke 16: 19, 20).*

Close the Gap, Mind the Gap: A regular traveller on London trains and subways would be very familiar with this warning blaring from the speakers repeatedly: *“Please mind the gap between the train and the platform ... Please mind the gap”!* Today the Readings are sounding a similar warning to us all; but this time, it not about the train and the platform. It is about us and our relationships with the less privileged, those our memorable Mother Teresa preferred to call “the poorest of the poor.” Prophet Amos, the Psalmist, the Second Reading, and the Gospel are saying to us: *“Please mind the gap between the rich and the poor ... please mind the gap!”* In effect, they are calling us not simply to mind the gap but to close that gap between the rich and the poor. The Readings can also be seen as reminding us of the Four Last Things – Death, Judgement, Heaven, Hell. It is our lives here, nay, our relationship with the weakest among us that will largely contribute to where we shall spend eternity.

Different Times, Same Realities: In today’s First Reading (Amos 6: 1, 4-7) prophet Amos bares out the angst of God against the rich in the society of his time. He is not simply speaking out against the rich in general but the obscenely rich who lying on “ivory beds and sprawling on their divans ... drink wine by the bowlful and use the finest oil to anoint themselves” but do not care about the “ruins of Joseph.” This description by Amos in some ways replicates the description of the rich man in Jesus’ parable in the Gospel of today (Luke 16: 19-31), who used to “dress in purple and fine linen and feast magnificently every day.” Like the rich men in the time of the prophet, the rich man in Jesus’ parable “did not care about the ruins of Joseph” personified in Lazarus, the poor man who laid at his gate. This parable, found only in the Gospel of Luke, is wrapped in pitiable contrasting images of the rich ignoring the presence of the poor; the poor inflicted in such poverty that his state is less than human – that he laid at the gate of the rich man means he must have been homeless; that he was covered with sores reflects both his unhygienic and impoverished state; that he longed for the scraps from the rich man’s table indicates his famished condition; and that dogs came and licked his sore sadly points to his powerlessness and helplessness. Does this remind us of any concrete images around us? That the sad reality painted by Jesus in the parable more than 2000 years ago are very

palpable in today's realities point to the fact humanity has not changed and that "The Word of God is alive and active" (Hebrews 4: 12).

A World Marred by Indifference: The world we live in is deeply divided along economic and social lines which sets the rich so far apart from the poor. As the popular parlance says: "The rich are getting richer, and the poor are getting poorer." The rich today still sprawl in their palaces and estates while the poor remains crawling outside their gates, seen but unnoticed. The structures of modern world dehumanise the poor and condemn him to irreversible conditions by stifling all possible avenues of meaningful livelihood: without education, without work, without commensurable salaries, without decent housing, without health care and without possibilities. Thus, as the global population increases, the number of the poor increases at astronomical rate. The insatiable attitude of the rich has deadened their sensibilities to the deprivations of the less privileged; they can no longer hear the cries and the wailings of the poor "Lazaruses" at their gates begging for the crumbs from their exalted tables. They, like the rich man in our parable, have failed to recognise that the poor man at the gate is a symbol of Jesus, "the least of our brothers", Who was bruised, derided, tortured, abandoned, famished, thirsty, beaten and crucified and left to die at the outskirts of the city of Jerusalem. And so, they too do not care, they simply do nothing about the concerns of the poor. The life and the living condition of Lazarus failed to move the rich man in our parable. But are we moved when we see the "new Lazaruses" on our streets, highways, high streets, in the parks and public places? Do we even notice them? Do we spare a minute, a look of care, a word of kindness to these men and women on the fringes of our society? Apathy and indifference have become the sins of our generation as they were the sins of the rich man in our parable. The words of Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* (54) cannot be neglected because its stark realism: "Almost without being aware of it, we end up being incapable of feeling compassion at the outcry of the poor, weeping for other people's pain, and feeling a need to help them, as though all this were someone else's responsibility and not our own. The culture of prosperity deadens us ... In the meantime, all those lives stunted for lack of opportunity seem a mere spectacle; they fail to move us."

The time to Change is Now: The rich man created a social chasm between himself and Lazarus while here on earth. He lived in his own world of sprawling affluence and bowlful squander mania while Lazarus barely survived in his own world of famished squalor and abject deprivations. There was no interaction, no

interference, no sharing of anything whatsoever. These were within his power to provide but he simply did not bother, as sometimes we do not bother to create the necessary conditions to close the gaps. This is the time to adjust in our lives and relationships with the “least of our brothers.” In matters of eternal, time is of essence. The rich man in our parable wished he had a second chance to change things, but it was too late. He wished someone could go tell his brothers, but they had to listen to the prophets at hand. We have the Church to listen to; we have the Bibles to read and live by. The time is now.

My dear friends, We are the brothers and sisters of the rich man, who have Moses and the prophets to listen to, and change. Our Lord Jesus Christ, the real Lazarus, has Risen from the dead and has come to warn us to “Mind (Close) the gap” so that we too do not come to this place of torment too (Luke 16: 28). In the Second Reading of today, Paul advises us: “As a man dedicated to God...fight a good fight of faith to win for yourselves the eternal life to which you are being called...” The critical way to fight and win this battle is to love and care about the needs of the poorest and weakest in our midst.