



GOSPEL GOSSIP

No, father Abraham...

St Luke 16. 19-31

Sunday 28 September

This is a well-known parable that Jesus told. A rich man feasted whilst a beggar longed just for a few scraps. Lazarus the beggar, for once named, died and went to heaven – rewarded for his faith. The other – unnamed – also died and went to the place of torment for his lack of faith. Dives, the rich man, saw how Lazarus was being so-well received, whilst he was not. To say this rankled is an understatement. Yet still the rich man cannot help acting in a condescending way towards Lazarus, and asks that Abraham, the patriarch of the Jewish faith, to send Lazarus to ease his suffering.

Abraham's refusal was not the end of the story. In his arrogance, Dives refuses to listen to Abraham's sad but firm negative response or the reasons for it, and tries to argue with Abraham. Recognising his own inevitable position, Dives wishes to have someone to warn his brothers so they could avoid the suffering of his own making which he was enduring. What arrogance!

- Are 'beggars' visible to you?
- Do you see someone in need as an opportunity for service or a nuisance to be avoided?
- Are you moved by compassion or pity – which is better?
- Is the thought of future judgement a worrying thought for you?
- How much do you want personal salvation rather than just a general one?

This is a parable about judgement. The just are rewarded and the wicked punished – all well and good. What is perhaps less apparent is that neither Lazarus or Dives are actively good or bad. Lazarus is a victim of his circumstances. He doesn't seem to be reacting negatively to them, but accepting them. He doesn't seem to have embarked on a life of crime or become violent in order to meet his basic needs, but is passive in his living. Likewise, Dives is passive. He isn't actively subjecting Lazarus to cruelty; in some ways he does worse – he is just oblivious to his needs or presence even.

Sometimes we can forget that we do wrong by not doing something. Inactivity is never neutral, it has just as much an effect as activity. And to be oblivious is especially cruel, because in being unaware, we are effectively denying the existence. The Church talks about 'sins of omission and commission' – things we have done and the good we have not done.

- Do you dismiss those things you feel you can't help with?
- In what ways do you 'walk by on the other side'?
- How would you feel to be ignored, and for people to be unaware of you?
- Are you attentive to the needs of others or dismissive?
- Would you rather be Dives or Lazarus?

As usual, Jesus is painting a stark picture, drawing vivid contrasts. We need to be reassured that God does not regard us as wholly bad, even if we aren't wholly good. God does not wish us to suffer, and the suffering we shall endure in the world to come will be of our own making not a punishment inflicted unilaterally by a over-zealous God. Such is God's desire to receive us all into his kingdom, that he gives us the ways and the means – his Son, Jesus Christ. Are we going to be convinced the one who did rise from the dead?