



GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

PARISH OF THE ANNUNCIATION OF OUR LADY, “EVANGELISMOS”

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SUNDAY 30 OCTOBER 2016 – THE PARABLE OF LAZARUS & THE RICH MAN

EPISTLE The Reading is from St Paul’s Letter to the 2Corinthians[11:31-33,12:1-9]

The God and Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. In Damascus the governor, under Aretas the king, was guarding the city of Damascenes with a garrison, desiring to arrest me; but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped from his hands. It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord: I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago – whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows – such a one was caught up to the third heaven. And I know such a man – whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows – how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. Of such a one I will boast; yet of myself I will not boast, except in my infirmities. For though I might desire to boast, I will not be a fool; for I will speak the truth. But I refrain, lest anyone should think of me above what he sees me to be or hears from me. And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, *“My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.”* Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

EXPLANATION:

Here, the Corinthians thought they were wise enough to evaluate Church leaders. They disparaged Paul, seeing him as a weakling without credentials. Using his opponents' level of argument, Paul lists his Jewish and Christian credentials to show them that if genealogy is so important to them, no one can compare with his "Christian experience". That is, his sufferings; his compassionate, involved concern for his people and even his bizarre adventures one of which was his escape from Damascus by being let down in a basket through a window. **(11:32-33)** He endured a shipwreck; spent many days in prisons; five times he received 40 stripes; beaten with rods; stoned; left in the wilderness; perils in cities; hunger and thirst; in nakedness etc. He possessed total love for God and dedication to Christ, factors which qualified him for his task but which also made him vulnerable to intensive attacks by Satan, who wanted to curtail his mission of bringing the Gospel to the Gentiles. Because Paul's opponents probably boasted of "**visions and revelations**", he resigns himself to relate to them a supernatural experience that he would normally not share with anyone because of the dangers of falling into the sin of pride. He does so now only to a limited degree, to establish, without a doubt, his authority as an Apostle. **(12:1)** He begins as though speaking about someone else. **Fourteen years ago** would date the event before his missionary journeys around 41AD. He was transported to the "**third heaven**", a Jewish expression for the highest heaven, Paradise, where God is surrounded by all the heavenly hosts. During this experience God revealed great mysteries to him, but even he did not know whether he was in his body or out of it at the time. **(12:2)** God gave Paul this experience because he was chosen for his ministry after Christ had ascended, and so had not been taught by Him in person. Paul speaks of having heard that which he could not reveal, just as St John the Evangelist was not allowed to write what the seven thunders had uttered in Revelations 10:4. As Jesus told Nicodemus, God does not reveal His mysteries to the worldly man because they are beyond his comprehension. (John3:12) **(12:4)** Because he had this experience by "**going out of himself**", he is not misleading the Jews by saying it happened to someone else. He resists the temptation to embellish facts to bring glory to himself, relating only what is necessary to establish his right to try to guide the Corinthian Christians. He wants to lead them to worship God, not him. **(12:5)** The visions and revelations Paul experienced gave him spiritual wisdom and power, but the difficulties that God allowed Satan to bring to Paul's life was to remind him and all who learn of his life and work that he was a human being, as dependent on God as everyone else. Paul sees his "**thorn in his flesh**" was given to him precisely so he might not be

“exalted”. St John Chrysostom and most Greek Fathers assert that this thorn was not a physical problem but a vulnerability to his enemies; those who tried to thwart his work and had him beaten, imprisoned and living under the constant threat of death. **(12:6)** Paul pleaded for God to deliver him from his torment but was told that his “thorn” would remain with him, so that it would be clear that his accomplishments could have been achieved only with divine assistance. That is, the power of Christ remains in him because of his weakness. **(12:8-9)**

GOSPEL The Reading is from St Luke [16:19-31]

There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who laid at his gate, desiring to be fed from the rich man’s table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. Then he cried and said, “Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, “Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.” Then he said, ‘I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father’s house, for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.” Abraham said to him, “They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.” And he said, “No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.” But he said to them, “If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.”

EXPLANATION:

In this Parable, the beggar is named. The rich man is not. God knows those poor outcasts who patiently endure hardship, but the rich who are known and highly esteemed by other people for their wealth and power, the Lord says, “I never knew you” (Matt 7:23); “Neither will I make mention of their name.” (Ps 15/16:4) What was the rich man’s sin? Not that he was rich. His sin was lovelessness. He saw Lazarus often, perhaps every day, yet ignored him. God placed him at the rich man’s doorstep deliberately in order to save the rich man. But he lacked love and

compassion. He saw him in hunger, in suffering, yet did nothing to help him. Even the dogs were more merciful. They licked his sores. His sin was his failure to show mercy on the beggar and to use his wealth for no one but himself. But it wasn't just Lazarus whom the rich man ignored. It was also Christ Who identifies Himself with every suffering Lazarus, "I was hungry and you fed me not." One of the great dangers of affluence is its enormous power to distract us from the love of God and love of neighbour. It tends to harden human hearts against the needs of others. It stands up self-righteously and literally condemns the poor and homeless. Wealth and goods do not belong to us. God loans them to us so that we may have enough to distribute to the poor and needy. We are responsible to Him for all we have. Poverty is not of itself righteousness, but patient endurance and acceptance of God's will without complaint. This is what carried Lazarus's soul by angels to **Abraham's bosom**. (heaven) Although the rich man did not notice Lazarus during his lifetime, he now asks for help from the very one he ignored. But death is the great turning point in this parable. Jesus shocks his bearers by claiming that after condemnation or judgment no help can be expected from the righteous. If the rich man had shown some sign of repentance or had tried to do something to rectify a lifetime of selfishness before it was too late, this beggar could have interceded for him as the time of his death drew near. He had not made a friend of the "**mammon of unrighteousness**", that is, he failed to use his wealth to minister to one of its victims. Now a "**great gulf**" separates them. That is, God has fixed a great chasm between sinners and the righteous which no one can cross. It is impossible to go from the place of punishment to the place of the righteous. God has placed the two states in close proximity so sinners might see their loss for choosing to separate themselves from God. In this parable we see that death does not destroy consciousness, nor identity, nor change of personality, nor memory, nor destiny. All are carried through into the afterlife and into eternity. There are many poor people in hell, just as there are many rich people in heaven. We will see loved ones wherever we are placed but we will not be able to help them. The pain of seeing one's loved ones tormented in hell would be so unbearable that it would make paradise hell. However, what is impossible for man is not impossible for God. It is possible for the burning love that a righteous person has for God to overcome in Paradise all earthly sorrow as we know it. Also our prayers and memorial services for the dead are an important invocation.