

REFLECTION

In today's Gospel reading from Luke, Jesus tells the story of Lazarus and a rich man. Lazarus is a poor man, lying at the door of the rich man, but the rich man does not offer anything to Lazarus to eat, or any other thing that might help him. When they die, Lazarus is in heaven, in the "bosom of Abraham," while the rich man is in hell. When the rich man sees Lazarus with Abraham, he cries out, "Father Abraham, have pity on me. Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am suffering torment in these flames." But Abraham reminds the rich man that he had his comfort while he was alive, while Lazarus was in misery. Now the situation has been reversed. And then Abraham says, "Moreover, between us and you a great chasm is established to prevent anyone from crossing who might wish to go from our side to yours or from your side to ours."

Whenever I hear or read this story, it is that chasm that draws my attention. It is easy to see that a chasm existed between the rich man and Lazarus when they were alive. But unlike the chasm of which Abraham spoke, this chasm was not impossible to cross. But it seems that the rich man convinced himself that the chasm was impassable.

When we look at the recent controversies about building a mosque near ground zero in New York, or a pastor announcing that he's going to make a public display of burning the Quran, we are reminded once again that chasms still exist between groups of people. One can easily add to the two examples cited above divisions between people along the lines of language, culture, lifestyle, politics, or economic condition. The choice before us is whether we make the effort to cross from "our" side to "theirs" or not. Unlike the chasm in the story, these chasms that exist have not been made by God; they have been made by us!

So we can choose to follow the example of the rich man, who chose not to "cross over" into Lazarus' world, and attend to his needs, or we can follow the example of the Son of God, who entered into our world in order to redeem us! We need not let the differences among us lead us to apathy or hatred or fear. We don't have to accept the lie that the chasms are too great for us to cross; that there is nothing that can be done, or that it is either "us" or "them!" We are not to make the poor invisible, nor those who are different the "enemy."

Is it possible to make it across the chasms that we have dug? With the grace of God in Jesus Christ, we can. In our second reading from 1 Timothy, Paul urges Timothy to "pursue righteousness, devotion, faith, love, patience, and gentleness." Why not express our faith and love by working with others to overcome the divisions that cause so much pain in our world? Just as there are examples of hatred and fear, there are examples of people of good faith coming together to make the world a better place, or in the language of Christians, help build up the kingdom. Like Timothy, let us make the "noble confession" of our faith, helping people in need, and working for peace and justice.

May God continue to bless us all, and may He give us the grace to cross the chasms that divide us.

In Christ,