



## 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time



**Date:** Sunday, September 29, 2019 | **Season:** Ordinary Time after Easter | **Year:** C

**First Reading:** Amos 6:1a, 4–7

**Responsorial Psalm:** Psalm 146:7–10 | **Response:** Psalm 146:1b

**Second Reading:** 1 Timothy 6:11–16

**Gospel Acclamation:** 2 Corinthians 8:9

**Gospel Reading:** Luke 16:19–31

**Preached at:** the Carmelite Monastery of Sr Thérèse in Benoni in the Archdiocese of Johannesburg, South Africa.

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**G**ood morning everyone. There are three things I want to propose that we reflect on today after hearing these three readings. They are firstly, what are we to do with luxuries? Secondly, how can I be sensitive? And thirdly, the difficult business of respecting the whole truth. But if you forget all of these, just remember, “do Good”.

So, firstly, how should we behave when confronted with wealth and comfort? Both the First reading and the Gospel speak of luxuries or luxurious living in some way.

Today’s first reading is part of the Prophet Amos’ speech that is full of woes to the political leaders of the northern kingdom of Israel. Amos is basically calling out the luxurious lives of the political elite whilst the working poor are suffering and becoming restless.

I know that we don’t have to look very hard or very far in this country, or others for that matter, to find a similar situation where our leaders seem out of touch; where they seem to think they are beyond the law; and they appear not to be too concerned with the people’s ruin – because they are only concerned with themselves and their own comfort. They too should be heeding the Prophet Amos.

Luxury was in fact the earlier form of lust in the list of 7 deadly sins. Luxury is the sin of the profiteer and in its form of wealth is also raised in the Gospel, in the contrast of the rich man to Lazarus. But let us remember that in the Gospel,

the rich man is not described as having done anything evil. Jesus uses him in his story because he failed to do good. He failed to notice the poor man Lazarus who was at his gates. He was not sensitive to the presence of Lazarus.

Perhaps one of the reasons he failed to notice the poor in front of him, was because he was preoccupied with himself – in life, and in death. Even in Hades he did not fully understand his situation and still assumed a superior status. He kept thinking that even from beyond the grave he was entitled and powerful enough to influence and secure his family's future. The real danger of riches is that it makes one complacent and self-absorbed – caring only for one's own interests... and one begins to believe in a distorted sense of self. The true wealth we must strive for is described in the 2nd reading: if we amass integrity, purity, devotion, patience, and gentleness in our lives, we will be truly blessed.

So what is someone who is in possession of luxury to do? For myself, I am reminded of the beginning of St Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises in which we pray for indifference before all created things, that we might use them only insofar as they bring us closer to God. This means that we are free before things and before God and we are able to use or enjoy anything as long as it helps us towards knowing or serving God more. In coming closer to God, we must inevitably do good in our lives. We should not allow ourselves to become like the Rich Man in the Gospel who failed to do good, or the political elite at the time of Amos who enjoy good things whilst inflicting suffering on others. Perhaps the reason they failed was that they took their attention away from God, and instead ended up, consciously or unconsciously, creating and worshipping an idol instead. So let's keep our eyes on God. That was, and actually should always be, point number one in any advice on deepening our relationship with Jesus Christ.

My second observation was concerning our sensitivity. How do we allow ourselves to notice, become aware of, understand, appreciate and affirm the people around us? In other words, how do we deepen our sensitivity to and for each other? Lazarus went almost unnoticed by the Rich Man, who even in death felt there was a chasm between him and Lazarus. I know for myself, when confronted with so much misery and poverty, sometimes how easy it is to be tempted to retreat into ourselves or to create a chasm, or buffer-zone if you will, that places a distance between us.

Let us this week try to notice, acknowledge and appreciate the presence of others in our lives – especially those who are actually in our lives, whom we have to walk past and interact with. It could just be with a smile, or a nod, or even, learning a name. It could be by recognizing our comfort-zones and taking just a small, single-step beyond them. So the second point I invite you to consider today is to cultivate our sensitivity for and of others. Let us never discount someone because of their race or job-status, or their being different to us. In fact, some of you might like to try a little experiment that involves removing the word ‘them’ from our vocabulary, and replacing it with ‘one of us’. One of us needs help. One of us is alone. One of us is ill. One of us is at the gate. One of us can help.

My final point arises out of the second reading and asks how do we become sensitive to the whole truth. In the second reading we heard Paul’s injunction to Timothy to fight the good fight, and to do this by keeping the commandments and preaching the Gospel, as it has been received and passed on, and not altered to suit a particular interest or special interest group. In other words, to honour the integrity of the Gospel, and not to cherry-pick. I believe that the fruit and fullness of the Gospel is always found in loving deeds, and therefore one must always strive to do good.

We recently celebrated Heritage Day. In South Africa we are blessed to have such a diverse set of cultures to which many of us owe our heritage; we are also blessed to share a common heritage of being part of building a new South Africa – something we can celebrate, but also recommit ourselves to. But as Catholics – we too have a heritage. It consists in doing good, and finding God; In bringing and being Christ to others; in creating loving families and friendly parishes, vibrant faith communities and honest citizenry concerned with the common good. It is all about seeing Christ in other people. This weekend we pray that we might allow this Catholic heritage to take root in our hearts and allow it to grow into every part of our being. When that happens, doing good will not seem so strange or extraordinary and we would not need to be reminded to do so from beyond the grave. When we allow love to be our instinctual reaction, as it is God’s, then we will discover that there are no barriers between us, only a relationship that can grow and deepen.

Today is also Refugee and Migrants Sunday – after the xenophobia we’ve experienced in South Africa, and with these readings, what more of an invitation do we need to notice Christ in our brothers and sisters in our midst?

So we are all being challenged this morning. Some of us might say ‘we do good works already’, but we can always ask ourselves if we can do more. We mustn’t let ourselves be blinded by luxury, we must keep our eyes on God and to see the world as God sees it, with every creature a beloved creation. We also don’t have to expect ourselves to radically shift our positions overnight – because we can all take just one step outside our comfort zone. But just imagine if we all took that step this week – it would widen the friendship and hospitality and generosity inside each of us, and we could share ourselves with those who need us. In the process, we might avoid the self-absorption and sentence that the Rich man suffered, the kind of end that the Prophet Amos warned against, that would prematurely end the fight that Paul so desperately wanted us to complete in order to attain eternal life. The Rich man was punished not for his riches, but for not acknowledging, even in death, the plight of the poor around him. Let us heed that warning – and not try to live a Christian life that has this truth and duty conveniently forgotten.

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Source: <https://sj.mcharlesworth.fr/homilies/2019-09sep-29-yc-ot-26/>

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