**TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR**

**25th September 2022**

**First Reading Amos 6:1.4-7**

Amos lived in the 8th century before Jesus. It was a time of relative peace and prosperity. But, as always, prosperity was uneven. Some did well, most did not. It was an age when poverty meant death or slavery.

To Amos and his contemporaries, misfortune was the punishment for sin but indifference to misfortune also offended God’s nature of justice and would be punished. Nothing short of a radical change of life-style could save Israel (5:4-6, 14-15) and Amos feared that it would not happen. He warned those who looked to the *'Day of the Lord*' as the time of triumph of God's people over all its enemies, that the Day would be darkness and not light (5:18).

Amos speaks to the complacent wealthy of both Judah and Israel. His description of the wealthy, lying on ivory beds, eating lamb and stall-fed veal, playing music, drinking wine, anointing and garlanding themselves, speaks for itself. Their crime is that they could not have cared less for the plight of the poor. This is the connection with today’s Gospel story of Dives and Lazarus.

For the oblivious Amos has a chilling warning: they will lead those whom the enemy will take into exile. This was literally fulfilled because the Assyrians took the prosperous and able first, leaving behind the women, children and incapable to fend as best they may in a land scorched by fire. In 725 B.C. the Northern kingdom of Israel was overrun.

**Responsorial Psalm: 145:6-10**

This psalm initiates the last group of Alleluia psalms in the psalter, all of them hymns of praise to Yahweh for his mighty acts. This example echoes the denunciation of the rich in the first reading and anticipates God's concern for the poor, and the hungry in the Gospel.

**Second Reading from Paul’s First letter to Timothy 6:11-16**

The words “……. When you made your profession …………. in front of many witnesses ……….” could refer to the Creed that a convert would recite during his Baptism on Holy Saturday. On the other hand it could equally refer to the ceremony by which Timothy was ordained, being given an authority over a geographical area with a number of Churches.

The words ‘presbyteros’ and ‘episkopos’ were interchangeable during a period when the ministry evolved in response to changing circumstances. The first word meant ‘an old man’ and therefore the ‘president’ in a social group. It was abbreviated to ‘priest’ The second word referred to the charge hand in a factory who supervised workers and through Old Saxon became ‘bishop’

You will notice that the Missal (Jerusalem Bible translation) has the last two verses printed as poetry. It is uncertain but these lines seem to represent seven Old Testament phrases, converted to Hellenistic language. The theme is the monotheistic and mysterious nature of God and may have been an early hymn.

**Gospel Lk 16:19-31**

In his stories, Jesus frequently took traditional well-known tales and gave them an unexpected twist for a penetrating lesson. Such is the evidence for a traditional upbringing together with an original mind having a confident authority. To-day’s parable is an example.

The first part of the parable of Dives and Lazarus was a well-known folk tale relating the reversal of fortunes in the next world. From the Latin, Dives meant ‘a wealthy person’ and was not a name. This is important because he is being contrasted to Lazarus who has a name. This indicates his personal value and it means ‘God has helped’ or ‘God helps’

It is a conventional piece of moralizing. As so often with Jesus’ parables, however, there is a surprise at the end—the dialogue between Dives and Abraham. This is where the real point of the parable lies.

The rich man asks that Lazarus be allowed to convey a special warning to his five brothers, who are still alive. The answer is that they have the prophecies, and that is sufficient. Those who are unmoved by the message of Scripture will not be convinced by a miracle either, even by a resurrection. Such, presumably, was Jesus' point in telling the parable but it was certainly used by Christians to explain why the story of the resurrection was not easily believed.

The parable teaches that the appearance of the deceased would be ineffective. It is interesting to contrast this with Dicken’s story of Marley and Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol.* I wonder if Dickens got the idea for his story from the Gospel but reversed the principle to suit his plot.

The fundamental story teaches the right use of wealth and it is therefore wrong to derive lessons on the state of the afterlife, or any other subject. But it may be explained that the reference to Abraham’s bosom was a traditional Jewish idiom, expressing the closest one could get to ultimate happiness. The phrase referred to a very close relationship as one’s head was as close as possible to the other’s heart. So in John 13:23— 'one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to him (literally, upon the bosom of Jesus),' that is, at his right side and leaning backward toward him.

Also from traditional Judaism, the fires of Hades drew their power from the permanently burning rubbish pit in the valley of Gehenna to the west of Jerusalem.

It is important to observe that nowhere is it suggested that Dives' wealth is ill-gotten nor that Lazarus is a victim of his oppression. The sin of Dives is that, cushioned by his lavish life-style, he is simply oblivious to the presence of a beggar at his gate. The contrast between the two in the subsequent life is more pronounced - but with reversed roles (v. 22). Here we have the same unmindful attitude that Amos castigates in the first reading.

The idea of a life after death was still new, and not universally held. Jesus' story reflected a contemporary Jewish notion of Sheol/Hades as it had been adapted in the wake of belief in resurrection and retribution after death. It was imagined to have two compartments. In one the just quietly awaited the resurrection while in the other the wicked were already being punished (vv. 23-24).

The abyss not only divides the two compartments of Sheol but marks definitive separation between the two classes of dead. In all this Jewish imagery we are not given anything resembling a 'topography of hell.' Besides, it is a description of the intermediate stage, before the Last Judgment.

This is one of the double-edged parables and, true to form, the greater emphasis is on the second point (vv. 27-31). But, just as in the first part, we are given no real description of hell, so here we can learn nothing of the damned.

The reaction of Dives is described from an ordinary point of view: his present sorry state has at last opened his eyes and he is understandably desirous that his brothers should escape his fate (vv. 27-28). Abraham answers that the five, who evidently led much the same sort of life as their unhappy brother, have 'Moses and the prophets,' that is, the Old Testament.

A text of Isaiah meets exactly the situation of Lazarus: what God asks of his people is 'to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked to cover him' (58:7).

The man makes one more bid (v. 30). Surely, if Lazarus were to come back from the dead his brothers would at last be moved and repent. This was retold to explain why not everyone was convinced by the Resurrection of Christ. The reply is that a miracle will not help those who have made no use of the means God has put at their disposal.

There is no doubt that Luke regarded the rich as unhappy and he invites us to pity them. The broad way along which they walk is not the path which leads to the Kingdom.