



The Parish Churches of S Philip and S Augustine and S Matthew with S Mary the Virgin Newcastle

Homily for the Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time (28th September) 2025

For all its familiarity, the Parable of *Dives and Lazarus*, as I was erroneously taught to call it as a child, is a complex narrative, which has a harder side to it than people often notice.

Superficially, it plays well to a benign human spirit: the underdog wins out in the end; and the greedy, insouciant man of wealth gets his comeuppance. This is a tale of divine justice; but one, which does not offer as much comfort as many suppose.

The implication of the story is that there is an inexorability to the end to which we come. What we term divine judgement is, in fact, simply the application of, so to speak, a cosmic rule in much the same way that if you put your hand in a pan of boiling water, your hand will burn. The rich man's eternal destination is not so much a punishment, but the simple consequence of his choices: he set his own course.

Behind the record of our deeds, of course, are the thought processes, which inform them; and these, too, can be vulnerable to inevitability: we develop a mindset, which amplifies one strand of information and opinion, whilst muting others, which might challenge the views we choose to espouse.

This has never been more clearly apparent than in our days of algorithms when a couple of clicks of the mouse on particular items can quickly draw us down a rabbit hole of likeminded posts on the internet to exclusion of the apparently infinite range of other material. The world can increasingly look exactly as we like to imagine it to be.

For all that, people are seldom, if ever, completely monochrome in their attitudes. The rich man and Lazarus are almost cardboard representatives of the poles at either end of the continuum, which spans the spectrum from virtue to vice; and the vast majority of us - maybe everyone - sits somewhere between them: even the most hardened heart feels twinges of compassion and the gentlest of souls can yield to moments of unwarranted harshness.

What is missing from the parable is divine mercy and the work of Redemption. Despite the fleeting reference to someone rising from the dead, there is not a consideration of how the Sacrifice of Christ can interrupt the consequences of the regrettable choices that we make by breaking the momentum, which otherwise would lead us from one step to the next along a path distancing us from God.

It is in prayerful reflexion on our attitudes, choices and experiences as well as through engagement with the life of the Christian community that we can slow or even halt the inexorable momentum leading us away from our God. We do not do this in our strength alone, of course. God's Grace mediated not least through the Sacrament of the Mass, because therein we encounter the Truth of which the author of the Epistle writes - whether or not we can see it for what it is.

Perhaps part of the import of the parable is that God's mercy does not compromise His justice; and in ways that are sometimes heavily opaque to us, they are in His keeping held together in a perfect synthesis. Yet despite this opacity, if we are to journey into the great Mystery of our Faith and learn more of the God, Who made us and to Whom we commit our lives, we must search for greater understanding of this balance between mercy and justice so that in our own approach to the human foibles we might increasingly reflect the Mind of the God, Whom we seek to serve; and in this way also set our minds and feet on a path, which will lead us to that Mercy.