



Reflection from Fr. Garry Richmeier

The story of the rich man and Lazarus is often used as a teaching against greed. It is implied that God sends the rich man to hell because he was greedy and didn't share with poor Lazarus who lay at his door everyday. Lazarus on the other hand, goes to heaven to be with Abraham. From there they have their famous conversation, which many interpret as a description of heaven and hell.

It is a story about avoiding greed, but it is probably not a description of heaven and hell as we think of it. The Jewish religion of Jesus' time didn't have a well defined theology of heaven and hell. Most descriptions of the after life were vague and undefined. Even this story doesn't support our notion of heaven and hell, since Lazarus ended up in "heaven" for no apparent reason other than he was poor.

The new testament Jewish culture/religion did have a clear sense of balance in all of creation. Just as there was night and day, summer and winter, feast and famine, etc., they believed there needed to be a balance in human affairs. An example is Mary's canticle which says "The mighty have been cast down from their thrones, and God has lifted up the lowly," meaning that God would restore the balance of power when people got it out of balance. Therefore, when Jesus tells the story of the rich man and Lazarus, those who heard it would recognize Lazarus' reward and the rich man's torment as the logical result of the restoration of balance.

In our culture we have a very difficult time finding balance. We work too much, or exercise too little, or demand too much entitlement, or buy too much stuff, or don't listen enough to each other, or do too many drugs, etc., etc. We have difficulty believing that like a see-saw, our actions have an automatic effect on others on the other end of the see-saw. We live under the illusion we are independent individuals and do not need to be concerned about how our choices or life-styles or buying habits affect anyone else.

It could be said that if the only Spiritual work that a person did was to daily work toward finding balance in everything they did, everything would fall into place. That is because balance is the natural state of the universe, and that is how God created us to work. Cooperating with that is how we find our place in God's creation.

*Blessings,
Fr. Garry*