

I Trinity 2024
Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish
Father Craig Looney
1 St. John 4.7-21 St. Luke 16.19-31
✠
It's all about LOVE!

We talk a lot about love in church. What exactly is Christian love? We often think of love as a purely emotional thing. Greek has several words for love: *eros* for romantic love; *philia* for brotherly love.

Today's Epistle and Gospel readings are about *agape*...the highest form of love...God's love for us and our love for Him. Agape love is active and dynamic. Agape love is more than just a feeling...it is an action. Agape is unconditional love. We show how much we love God by showing how much we love others.

The parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus is the story of a wealthy man who loved his money more than he loved others. It is the only parable in which Jesus gives a name to one of the characters...Lazarus. His name comes from the Hebrew *Eleazar*..."God is my help."

Jesus doesn't give a name to the rich man, but he is often called *Dives*...from the Latin word meaning a "very rich man." He lived in the best part of town, in the grandest of mansions, and had expensive tastes for food. His god was his material possessions.

The Gospel tells us Lazarus was a poor man who was covered in open sores. That would have made him an outcast...someone people avoided. If that wasn't bad enough...dogs came and licked his open sores. It hurt so much to walk he had friends bring him to the rich man's door. And he was hungry...if only he could have some of the rich man's leftovers.

What follows is one of the most wonderful and comforting scenes. The poor man dies and is "*carried by the angels to sit beside Abraham at the feast in heaven.*" All his suffering ended...Lazarus rejoiced in God's presence. Heaven is the place, John tells us in Revelation, where God will wipe away all tears from our eyes.

What about the rich man? The Gospel is not a condemnation of his wealth. It's about the consequences of ignoring someone in need or

failing to show a simple act of kindness when the opportunity presents itself. The rich man could have helped Lazarus...the implication in the parable is he had the means to do so. But living the lifestyle he was accustomed to was more important to the rich man than helping a sick and starving man.

The rich man ends up in hell...forever separated from God's love. God didn't send him to hell...God never sends anyone to hell, because hell is not in our best interest. It's God's wish we enjoy life everlasting with him in heaven. The rich man chose hell. The moral of the story...it matters how we treat other people.

In the Epistle, John calls us dear friends and tells us we must love one another, because love comes from God, and those who love are God's children and know him. We show how much we love God by doing what's best for others. Because God loves us so much he was willing to send Jesus for our salvation, we must act on his love and share it with others. We can't keep God's love for us to ourselves.

Our Parish Family makes a cash contribution every Thanksgiving to CALL Primrose so they can buy the food they need to feed individuals and families in San Mateo County. Last year CALL provided over 70,000 meals to people in San Mateo County. We should all consider making a contribution to CALL at other times. There is another Lazarus out there somewhere who needs help.

What we should learn from today's reading is to take our material gifts, which are gifts from God and share them in whatever way we can. Most of us have shoes and clothes in good condition we can no longer wear. It takes only a few minutes to drop them in one of those green boxes we see in the parking lot of our favorite market. Whatever we do to help others we should do so with great joy. The doing is in itself a reward!

Love is more than a word we hear in church. It is the Christian Imperative; the call to ACTION. It is taking the Great Commandment seriously: Love God with all our heart, mind and soul; and love our neighbor as we want to be loved. To love each other is to love God. To love God is to love each other.

It's all about LOVE!
✠