

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Back in the day, when I used to read the newspapers (does anybody still read newspapers?), I would glance at the front page, skim the sports page, and then read the funnies, or the comics, if you will. One that I was especially fond of was Garfield the Cat (remember him?). His snarky, sarcastic witticisms never failed to make me laugh.

I remember one cartoon that had Garfield, on a cold winter night, looking out the window, where he sees Odie the Dog peering back at him. Garfield says, "This is horrible! This is terrible! Here I am in the comfort of a warm house, well fed, and there's Odie outside, shivering, hungry, begging to get in. I just can't stand it. I have to do something about this." So at that he goes over to the window...and closes the curtains.

It's the sin of the rich man in today's parable. He simply closed his eyes to the plight of Lazarus, begging at his doorstep. And Jesus makes it real plain-for this neglect of his neighbor, the rich man went straight to hell.

Here we are two thousand years later and we have become so much more sophisticated in our neglect of the poor. We don't have to close the curtains, nor worry about the homeless and destitute sitting at our doorstep because we have moved far enough away from "them" that we never have to even think about "them", let alone see "them".

And that's the problem isn't it? There is "them" and there is "us". There is little sense that we are all in this together.

Many years ago, when I ministered in North Philadelphia, during the gang war years and saw poor black children fighting and killing one another, it appalled me that no one in the larger community seemed to care. It occurred to me then that no one would do anything about it until the killing started happening in the larger community. Then, along came the drug addiction years and I ministered to family after family whose children were killing themselves with drugs, which by the way was the sole reason the gang wars stopped, because the gang members succumbed to drug addiction. Again, I realized no one would do anything about the drugs until it hit the larger community.

Well, I've lived long enough to see my prophecies come to pass. We now have mass shootings in suburban school districts, where things like this are not supposed to happen. And I am sure that is a rare family represented in this church today that hasn't had or doesn't have someone in the family addicted to drugs.

We simply cannot close our eyes or our curtains or build walls around our communities, thinking that the demons spawned by poverty will not create hell for us right here on earth, as well as lead to our own eternal damnation.

Notice in the parable that the rich man, in his arrogance, asks Abraham to send Lazarus (notice he even knows his name, and never lifted a finger to help him), to warn his five brothers. Abraham says it won't matter, even if Lazarus was to go to them from the dead, they won't listen to him. Why? Because they, like the rich man, would not accept him as their brother, any more than the rich man could recognize that he had a sixth brother-his name is Lazarus.

This parable made a man with three doctoral degrees - in medicine, theology, and philosophy - leave the culture and amenities of Europe to serve the poorest, most destitute people of Africa. This parable induced him, who was recognized as one of the best concert organists in the world, go to a place where there were no organs to play. This parable so intensely motivated

him to give up a teaching position on Vienna, to go and serve people who were so deprived that they were still living in the superstitions of the dark ages. This parable so radically altered his life, that Dr. Albert Schweitzer abandoned everything that the world says is important to serve the poorest people on the faith of the earth. His name to this day, almost fifty years since his death, is synonymous with Christian charity.

What will your name or my name be remembered for-in this life and the next. Will the Lord say to us, as he does in Matthew 25, "Come! You have my Father's blessing! Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you welcomed me; naked and you clothed me; I was ill and you comforted me; in prison and you came to visit me."

Or will he say, "Out of my sight, you condemned, into that everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels! I was hungry and you gave me no food. I was thirsty and you gave me no drink. I was away from home and you gave me no welcome, naked and you gave me no clothing. I was ill and in prison and you did not come to comfort me."

"As often as you neglected to do it to one of these least ones, you neglected to do it to me."

Albert Schweitzer bet his whole life and his eternal salvation on these words of Jesus. Where are you placing your bets?

By the way we are desperately in need of volunteers to help with our community outreach to those in need in our community who are willing to recognize that "they" are "us". If you care to help, please call the Rectory today!