

HOMILY SUNDAY 26-C

“Repentance and Compassionate Caring”

(Amos 6:1, 4-7; Psalm 146; 1 Timothy 6:11-16; Luke 16:19-31)

Have you ever heard someone you loved and care about, say the words “I don’t care” to you?
How did that make you feel?

Repent: be more compassionate and caring.

The sin of the rich man is unbelief: contempt of the poor, selfishness and wastefulness are the forms this unbelief takes. The one who does not believe in an invisible world of God’s justice, truth and joy, will place his or her trust in material things of the world. The rich man, therefore, characterizes the life of those who are slaves to materialism because they lack confidence in God. The book of James has the author state: “Show me your faith, and I will show you my works.” The rich man lacked works of mercy, so his faith was weak. Our faith in God who is love must be expressed by caring and compassionate action.

There will be no special dispensation for those who refuse the needs of the poor at their gate. If they will not hear the Scriptures and be merciful, they show that they have placed themselves beyond the reach of God’s mercy. By the end of the parable, we realize that we stand in the place of the brothers, and the question is whether we will hear the Scriptures and repent.

At the end of Luke’s gospel, we are told of two disciples whose hearts were burning within them when Jesus explained the Scriptures to them, and they recognized him in the breaking of the bread. If the rich man had tended to Lazarus’s needs and invited him to share a meal with him, perhaps he too would have understood the Scriptures and recognized in Lazarus the Lord who had always been a stranger to him.

In the end, even giving to the poor is not true charity. Fundamental neighbourliness is to have God’s attitude towards the poor, to have the attitude of one’s heart that is prized by God.

Compassion is the ability to feel in one’s guts, the pain of another person, and doing what one can to alleviate that person’s suffering. Compassion must be expressed in concrete action to help another. The late Archbishop Paul Dumouchel, in his travels around the diocese, encouraged his flock to sacrifice even a cigarette a day to raise funds for the third world, pointing out that the poor there did not have welfare or social assistance and certainly we in the developed world could and should help them. His was a very practical and lived compassion.

Compassion can also be expressed through listening to others feelings and pain. Support groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous meetings where there is a rule of no cross talk is a good example. People are free to share their feelings and experiences in a safe environment where the others do not react but simply listen with attention, caring and compassion, and that acceptance is life-giving.

When I was a young scholastic seminarian, I chose Adam Exner, who later became a bishop, as my

spiritual director. When I went to see him for our first session, he told me that if he was going to be my director, he needed to know my story. I asked him what story? He then invited me to tell him the story of my life beginning as far back as I could remember. I was amazed to realize that during that first session I talked for over an hour. Our second session was just as long as I continued my story. He then wisely suggested that I work on my relationship with my father (something I had never heard of or thought of before) and gave me one passage of scripture to pray over for one month, Isaiah 43:1-7. That prayer actually changed my life, as I heard God tell me that I was loved, not for what I had or could do, but simply because I was precious in God's sight. That was a conversion experience for, flowing out of the compassion of my spiritual director who affirmed me by hearing my story.

Today I would apply what Fr. Adam did for me, to parents. Too often parents have the idea that their role is to talk to their kids and tell them what to do. May I suggest that an even more important role is for parents to listen to their kids, provide an environment for them in which it is safe for them to share their true feelings with their parents. That compassionate caring and listening within the family will, I am convinced, be a powerful healing force for any family that does so. Such action will go a long way to answering the emotional needs of the children to be loved, to belong and to be valued.

The Eucharist we celebrate together today makes present the compassion of Jesus for us who gave his life for us on the cross, and listens to us every time we pray.

So repent: be more compassionate and caring.