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Annunciation Parish, Shumway, Illinois
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The Twenty-sixth Sunday of the Year (C)

What is it about this rich man that we dislike so much? Jesus gives us very little information about him, yet we do not like him at all; we don't even pity him. "The rich man, in purple splendor, is not accused of being greedy or carrying off the property of another, or of committing adultery, or, in fact, of any wrongdoing. The evil alone of which he is guilty is pride."¹

The pride from which he suffers leads him to believe that he can ignore the plight of others, that he need not lift a finger or drop a morsel to help them. In his arrogance he convinces himself that he is not required to help the poor. Surely it is the poor man's fault he is poor. He is lazy. He is drunk. He is a sinner. These thoughts all stem from pride and they become his downfall.

Each day the man saw Lazarus dying of starvation and thirst and never did he help him. How very often do each of us act like this rich man? We see the poor among us. We travel to larger cities and see them on the sidewalks. We know that are among us even here, though they are not so apparent. The continual appeals of Catholic Charities are enough to tell us this. How often do we blame them for their hardships and in our own pride refuse them the help they need?

When we do see them, do we not often wonder why they aren't working or looking for work? Why are they out in the open for all to see? Should Lazarus not have been in the marketplace rather than at the rich man's door? "Lazarus was lying at the gate in order to draw attention to the cruelty paid to his body and to prevent the rich man from saying, 'I did not notice him. He was in a corner. I could not see him. No one announced him to me.' He lay at the gate. You saw him every time you went out and every time you came in. When your crowds of servants and clients were attending you, he lay there full of ulcers."² Even so, seeing Lazarus every day, the rich man's heart was never moved to love, never moved to sympathy, never moved to compassion.

¹ Saint Jerome, *On Lazarus and Dives*, 260.

² Saint Jerome, *On Lazarus and Dives*, 261.

Lazarus does nothing to offend the rich man. He doesn't even ask for the scraps from his table; he simply hopes for them.

Consider the cruelty with which the rich man treats Lazarus. In the eyes of the rich man Lazarus is not a human being, he is not even a dog. Simply recall Jesus' encounter with the Canaanite woman. "Please, Lord," she said to him, "for even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from the table of their masters" (Matthew 15:27).

Yet it is the dogs who care for Lazarus when the rich man ignores his needs. "Yes, it says that even the dogs licked his sores and did not injure him yet sympathized with him and cared for him. Animals relieve their own sufferings with their tongues, as they remove what pains them and gently soothe the sores. The rich man was crueler than the dogs, because he felt no sympathy or compassion for him but was completely unmerciful."³

³ Cyril of Alexandria,