

Homily: Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary time

September 25, 2022.

Saint Patrick Catholic Church, Frederiksted, St. Croix

Readings:

Amos 6: 1a, 4-7

Psalms 146:7, 8-9, 9-10 (R/ 1b)

1 Timothy 6: 11-16

Luke 16: 19-31



Inspirational lines for the Homily from the above Readings.

“Woe to the complacent in Zion! They drink wine from bowls and anoint themselves with the best oils; yet they are not made ill by the collapse of Joseph!”

“Father Abraham, have pity on me. Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am suffering torment in these flames.’ Abraham replied, my child, remember that you received what was good during your lifetime while Lazarus likewise received what was bad; but now he is comforted here, whereas you are tormented.”

“Lay hold of eternal life, to which you were called when you made the noble confession in the presence of many witnesses.”

Theme: “Your tomorrow is in your today.” (i.e., what you sow today you will reap tomorrow)

One musician has sung loud and clear that ‘nobody knows tomorrow.’ This is generally what we hold in our ordinary daily life that ‘Nobody knows tomorrow.’ Today reflecting on the readings given us for the Liturgy we want to say as Christians that we know our tomorrow, today. Therefore, our theme of reflection this Sunday is, ‘Your tomorrow is in your today *i.e., what you sow today you will reap tomorrow*.’ I have a friend who is a nurse. She came to visit me and after observing how I was eating in my Parish told me; ‘Father, eat your food as medicine, otherwise you will at your old age eat medicine as your food’. When she said this, I didn’t listen. I told her to go away because she was disturbing me from enjoying the meals set before me. I also use to consume a lot of sugar. I told her I don’t care, and I concluded, ‘man must die of something.’ After a few weeks I was

diagnosed with high blood pressure and told I was pre-diabetic. Then I was put on a daily high blood treatment. This is when I fully understood the nurse friend and I regretted my attitude and what I even said. If I ate sugar and other foods as medicine, I would not have arrived at this condition of High blood pressure and of being pre-diabetic.

Talking about what one sows the Sacred Scriptures confirm this theme in different ways as follows.

2 Corinthians 9:6 says, "Remember this: if you sow sparingly, you will reap sparingly, and if you sow generously, you will reap generously as well."

When we examine Psalm 126:5-6, we read, "Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy. Those who go forth weeping carrying the seeds to be sown will return with shouts of joy carrying their sheaves."

Galatians 6:7-8 adds, "Do not be deceived; God cannot be mocked. A person will reap only what he sows. The one who sows in the flesh will reap a harvest of corruption, but the one who sows in the spirit the reward of eternal life."

These scriptural passages talk about reaping what we sow we translate as 'Your tomorrow is in your today.'

In the readings of today's Liturgy, this theme is presented to us practically. In the first reading Israel is taken into captivity (exile) into Babylon with her leaders at the head, first the Northern Kingdom in 721 BC and then the Southern Kingdom in 587 or 586 BC, because of their leaders uncritical, noisy partying or merry making to the neglect of the poor. The leaders lie on their ivory beds and comfortably on their couches eating meat from their flock, improvising music like King David, drinking wine from bowls, and anointing themselves with the best of oils, while neglecting the poor. They do not recognize (***they are not made ill***) by the collapse of Joseph. This allusion to Joseph in the first reading, recalls the story of Joseph whose brothers sold him into slavery in Egypt as they sat enjoying their meal (Genesis 37:12-36). By analogy, while their brothers and sisters are sold into the slavery of poverty by their attitude and behaviour towards them, the leaders went ahead to enjoy themselves. The consequence is that they are the first to be carried into exile. The leaders did not weep with those who wept; they had no sympathy for their brethren and fellow creatures. As punishment for their self-indulgence, they were first taken into captivity, as they reckoned themselves as first among the people and claimed the preference in everything. The proverb that says, as you make your bed, so shall you lie on it is best suited to these leaders. We translate it to mean 'our tomorrow is in our today.'

In the gospel passage, the famous story of the rich man and the poor man Lazarus is recounted. The rich man feasts sumptuously neglecting the poor Lazarus at his door and when their lives end in this world each one reaps what he had sowed. Lazarus who sowed in tears waiting in vain on the charity of the rich man which did not come is taken into heaven, while the rich man takes his rightful position in hell for neglecting Lazarus. This is what he had sown for himself by refusing to be charitable to Lazarus, whose only companions were his dogs because they were attracted to his open sores. From Hell the rich man recognizes Lazarus in the bosom of Abraham and begs to cool his tongue with water from the charity of Abraham through the instrumentality of Lazarus who is now in Abraham's bosom. The rich man says, **“Father Abraham, have pity on me. Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am suffering torment in these flames.** Abraham replied by reminding him of his yesterday which was at that time his today of the neglect of Lazarus, before stating the impossibility of such a charitable gesture which is being demanded by the rich man from him. Let us listen attentively to Abraham's answer; **my child, remember that you received what was good during your lifetime while Lazarus likewise received what was bad; but now he is comforted here, whereas you are tormented.**” This rich man's present situation was present in his yesterday behaviour. Thus 'your tomorrow is in your today.' The tomorrow that comes because of your today's behaviour becomes irreversible at death. Thus, regrets or joy is experienced when at one's death depending on his/her tomorrow present today he/she had acted as the case of the rich man who neglected Lazarus.

This Parable of Jesus has another basic teaching that God has put or puts teachers like Moses and the prophets to shape our today, so that our tomorrow can be guaranteed. Therefore, the plea of the rich man for somebody to be sent to his father's house from the dead to instruct his brothers to avoid this terrible place of torments is answered as follows. They have Moses and the prophets with them. Let them listen to them, for if they do not listen to them even someone rising from the dead will not frighten them into changing their today to guarantee their tomorrow. They must listen to the teachers given to them to direct them, in our case the priests entrusted to us. Mother Church through her priests bring the will of God to bear on the today of our lives which is the making of the eternity for us depending on our response. If we listen to them and act positively our tomorrow is guaranteed.

St. Paul in the 2nd reading of today writing to Timothy teaches him and us the things which if we should pursue, the appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ (**his 2nd coming**) will not meet us unprepared like the rich man in our Gospel and like the leaders of Israel taken into

captivity into Babylon. St. Paul tells Timothy and us, to pursue righteousness, to be devoted to our Lord and God, to have faith, love, patience, and gentleness now in our dealings with others, for our today is our tomorrow. He asked Timothy and us to stand firm in our faith, so that we can lay hold of the eternal life, which is our calling when we received baptism and pledged in faith before many witnesses to work for eternal life with God.

We are therefore saying that an evaluation of the today of our lives in relationship to our faith in Christ Jesus and his Church is a clear indication of what our tomorrow is and will be. What is your lifestyle now? How do you use what you have now? Do you include the poor, the sick and the marginalized in your life's agenda or you think more of yourself and your comfort? This was the neglect of the leaders of Israel, and this was the cause of the Babylonian Captivity. Their tomorrow was the result of their today (their present action). Are there any poor Lazarus' around you? Do not neglect them. Your tomorrow passes through them. The poor Lazarus before you invite you today to help, but it is your tomorrow. This is echoed in the judgement scene in Matthew 25:31-46. In this text the righteous and the unrighteous ask the same question which is answered in the positive and in the negatively respectively. ***“Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or ill or in prison and minister to you or did not minister to you respectively?”*** The Lord's answer is the same. ***Insofar as you did or did not do this to the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the prisoner, you did not do it to me.*** This is to conclude also that those we live with now determine our tomorrow. Thus, our tomorrow is in our today.

Haven said this; we must indicate that in us we are both the rich man and the poor Lazarus. We combine the two characters as Christians. We are called to give of what we must those who are in need whom we meet every day. This means we are all rich in one way or the other. One time we are poor Lazarus, and, in another time, we are the rich man. Also, our Lazarus' constantly changes. Thus, we need faith, love, patience, and gentleness to recognize the Lazarus' lying by the door of our lives, by our offices, by the public places, by the beaches, by the airports, in our neighbourhoods and even in our own very homes. Do not mistake the poverty of Lazarus here to material poverty only. There is also psychological, spiritual, intellectually, and racial discrimination poverty. So many persons are in want. Let us use our various riches whatever the case may be to help the Lazarus' around us.

On the other hand, we are also poor Lazarus with open sores that needs to be healed and attended to. Let us like Lazarus lie at the doors of the rich and accept help from them. Let us be ready to accept to be helped. There are many persons who are poor but because

they have wealth or some riches, they do not listen to anybody. They feel on top of the world. A close examination of their lives shows they are poor, but they have refused help because their wealth has deceived them into think they have everything. They are blind to their own poverty. This is very much seen in learning what God wants of us here and now. Let us be humble enough to learn and specially to listen to the Moses' and the prophets God has sent to us in our midst. The attitude of despising the teachers of the faith, suspecting them especially because they are human beings with weaknesses, or from a certain class of people or social standing or because they say things which we do not like is the attitude which leaves us in our poverty. What is important is that as poor Lazarus' we must allow ourselves to be helped in our poverty, so that we live good lives in this world, for Jesus came that we may have life and have it to the full (John 10:10). If Lazarus did not recognize his poverty, he would not have been lying at the rich man's door and finally earned heaven. When we do not recognize our poverty today, especially of the things that God wants us to do we miss our tomorrow with him, because we become the rich man, blocking ourselves from listening to the Moses' and prophets in our midst and paving our way to hell. God's providence gives us help every moment of our lives and especially when we are in difficulties like poor Lazarus. If in faith we recognize God's providence in our daily lives we would not fear the tomorrow of our lives, because our tomorrow will be evident in our today.

Let us therefore pray for the grace to realize that our tomorrow is embedded in us today in what we do, say and especially in our attitudes towards others especially the poor, our high conception of ourselves neglecting to see how poor we are and where we need others to lead us to God and our attitude towards Mother Church, the teacher and guarantor of our faith. Do not forget the saying of my nurse friend; if you don't eat your food as medicine today, you will eat medicines as food tomorrow. In conclusion, if your today is not lived according to God's will, your tomorrow will be in hell with the devil as the rich man in the Gospel passage of today. Remember that you have today (now) and not tomorrow. Thus, your tomorrow is in your today. This recognition changes our whole attitude to life. To God is the glory in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

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