

in a

Word™

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The word of God is alive and powerful, capable of converting hearts and leading them back to God. When we close our heart to the gift of God's word, we end up closing our heart to the gift of our brothers and sisters.
-Pope Francis

The Word is a gift. Other Persons are a gift

Message of Pope Francis for Lent 2017

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Lent is a new beginning, a path leading to the certain goal of Easter, Christ's victory over death. This season urgently calls us to conversion. Christians are asked to return to God "with all their hearts" (Joel 2:12), to refuse to settle for mediocrity and to grow in friendship with the Lord. Jesus is the faithful friend who never abandons us. Even when we sin, he patiently awaits our return; by that patient expectation, he shows us his readiness to forgive (cf. Homily, 8 January 2016).

Lent is a favourable season for deepening our spiritual life through the means of sanctification offered us by the Church: fasting, prayer and almsgiving. At the basis of everything is the word of God, which during this season we are invited to hear and ponder more deeply. I would now like to consider the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (cf. Lk 16:19-31). Let us find inspiration in this meaningful story, for it provides a key to understanding what we need to do in order to attain true happiness and eternal life. It exhorts us to sincere conversion.

1. The other person is a gift

The parable begins by presenting its two main characters. The poor man is described in greater detail: he is wretched and lacks the strength even to stand. Lying before the door of the rich man, he fed on the crumbs falling from his table. His body is full of sores and dogs come to lick his wounds (cf. vv.20-21). The picture is one of great misery; it portrays a man disgraced and pitiful. The scene is even more dramatic if we consider that the poor man is called Lazarus: a name full of promise, which literally means God helps. This character is not anonymous. His features are clearly delineated and he appears as an individual with his own story. While practically invisible to the rich man, we see and know him



as someone familiar. He becomes a face, and as such, a gift, a priceless treasure, a human being whom God loves and cares for, despite his concrete condition as an outcast (cf. Homily, 8 January 2016).

Lazarus teaches us that other persons are a gift. A right relationship with people consists in gratefully recognizing their value. Even the poor person at the door of the rich is not a nuisance, but a summons to conversion and to change. The parable first invites us to open the doors of our heart to others because each person is a gift, whether it be our neighbour or an anonymous pauper. Lent is a favourable season for opening the doors to all those in need and recognizing in them the face of Christ. Each of us meets people like this every day. Each life that we encounter is a gift deserving acceptance, respect and love. The word of God helps us to open our eyes to welcome and love life, especially when it is weak and vulnerable. But in order to do this, we have to take seriously what the Gospel tells us about the rich man.

2. Sin blinds us

The parable is unsparing in its description of the contradictions associated with the rich man (cf. v. 19). Unlike poor Lazarus, he does not have a name; he is simply called "a rich man". His opulence was seen in his extravagant and expensive robes. Purple cloth was even more precious than silver and gold, and was thus reserved to divinities (cf. Jer 10:9) and kings (cf. Jg 8:26), while fine linen gave one an almost sacred character. The man was clearly ostentatious about his wealth, and in the habit of displaying it daily: "He feasted sumptuously every day" (v. 19). In him we can catch a dramatic glimpse of the corruption of sin, which progresses in three successive stages: love of money, vanity and pride (cf. Homily, 20 September 2013).



The Apostle Paul tells us that "the love of money is the root of all evils" (1 Tim 6:10). It is the main cause of corruption and a source of envy, strife and suspicion. Money can come to dominate us, even to the point of becoming a tyrannical idol (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 55). Instead of being an instrument at our service for doing good and showing solidarity towards others, money can chain us and the entire world to a selfish logic that leaves no room for love and hinders peace.

The parable then shows that the rich man's greed makes him vain. His personality finds expression in appearances, in showing others what he can do. But his appearance masks an interior emptiness. His life is a prisoner to outward appearances, to the most superficial and fleeting aspects of existence (cf. *ibid.*, 62).

The lowest rung of this moral degradation is pride. The rich man dresses like a king and acts like a god, forgetting that he is merely mortal. For those corrupted by love of riches, nothing exists beyond their own ego. Those around them do not come into their line of sight. The result of attachment to money is a sort of blindness. The rich man does not see the poor man who is starving, hurting, lying at his door. Looking at this character, we can understand why the Gospel so bluntly condemns the love of money: "No one can be the slave of two masters: he will either hate the first and love the second, or be attached to the first and despise the second. You cannot be the slave both of God and of money" (Mt 6:24).

3. The Word is a gift

The Gospel of the rich man and Lazarus helps us to make a good preparation for the approach of Easter. The liturgy of Ash Wednesday invites us to an experience quite similar to that of the rich man. When the priest imposes the ashes on our heads, he repeats the words: "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return". As it turned out, the rich man and the poor man both died, and the greater part of the parable takes place in the afterlife. The two characters suddenly discover that "we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it" (1 Tim 6:7).



We too see what happens in the afterlife. There the rich man speaks at length with Abraham, whom he calls "father" (Lk 16:24.27), as a sign that he belongs to God's people. This detail makes his life appear all the more contradictory, for until this moment there had been no mention of his relation to God. In fact, there was no place for God in his life. His only god was himself.

The rich man recognizes Lazarus only amid the torments of the afterlife. He wants the poor man to alleviate his suffering with a drop of water. What he asks of Lazarus is similar to what he could have done but never did. Abraham tells him: "During your life you had your fill of good things, just as Lazarus had his fill of bad. Now he is being comforted



here while you are in agony" (v. 25). In the afterlife, a kind of fairness is restored and life's evils are balanced by good. The parable goes on to offer a message for all Christians. The rich man asks Abraham to send Lazarus to warn his brothers, who are still alive. But Abraham answers: "They have Moses and the prophets, let them listen to them" (v. 29). Countering the rich man's objections, he adds: "If they will not listen either to Moses or to the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone should rise from the dead" (v. 31).



The rich man's real problem thus comes to the fore. At the root of all his ills was the failure to heed God's word. As a result, he no longer loved God and grew to despise his neighbour. The word of God is alive and powerful, capable of converting hearts and leading them back to God. When we close our heart to the gift of God's word, we end up closing our heart to the gift of our brothers and sisters.

Dear friends, Lent is the favourable season for renewing our encounter with Christ, living in his word, in the sacraments and in our neighbour. The Lord, who overcame the deceptions of the Tempter during the forty days in the desert, shows us the path we must take.

May the Holy Spirit lead us on a true journey of conversion, so that we can rediscover the gift of God's word, be purified of the sin that blinds us, and serve Christ present in our brothers and sisters in need. I encourage all the faithful to express this spiritual renewal also by sharing in the Lenten Campaigns promoted by many Church organizations in different parts of the world, and thus to favour the culture of encounter in our one human family. Let us pray for one another so that, by sharing in the victory of Christ, we may open our doors to the weak and poor. Then we will be able to experience and share to the full the joy of Easter.

From the Vatican, 18 October 2016
FRANCIS



For comments by the editor of *IN A WORD* go to page 4

in a word or two

From the Editor

Even though Lent is half over we bring to everyone's attention in this issue the Lenten message of Pope Francis. Why? Because the Pope's words about the rich man and Lazarus are truly applicable to the situation of health care at the present time in this country.

Millions of people will lose health insurance under the proposed change to the Affordable Health Care Act. News accounts of the flawed plan abound and it is not "fake news". The New York Times on the day after the report summed it up well:

"The Congressional Budget Office released a jawdropping report Monday estimating that the Republican health plan would take insurance from 24 million people, many of them Republican voters, and raise medical costs for others. The bill effectively rescinds benefits for the elderly, poor, sick and middle class, and funnels the money to the rich, via tax cuts."

We ask how can such a bill be passed? It is a moral tragedy that passes over people as if they are unimportant. To listen to the proponents of the bill with callous talk about the lives of people is alarming. To hear the cold, mean spirited, dismissiveness of the lives of other human beings is incredible. Yet, these same arrogant politicians don't count the poor or marginalized as worth much. What is important is the almighty dollar.

Whatever happened to the concept of the common good? Seems the good is reserved to the 2 %.

What's lost among the political rhetoric and ideology are people. The numbers leave little room for human beings seeing a doctor when they get sick. "But we have to have freedom" so say the politicians. And deficit reduction. And corporate tax cuts. And building a wall. "Far better" for treating your child's cancer, or your own.

Pope Francis' Lenten message stands in stark contrast to the many who care more about hurting the poor and marginalized and rewarding the wealthy. For the Pope asks us to recognize that people are a gift. That is what it means to heed God's word.

So, yes, people need to raise their voices in protest. What is going on right now is wrong. Totally wrong. Where is the compassion? Its disgusting to see and hear the mighty men of power proclaim that deficit reduction and numbers are more important than people.

God bless Pope Francis. May we remember that all people are important not just a select few. Time for Christians to start acting in the spirit of Christ.



Pope Francis has named Father Roy Edward Campbell Jr., pastor of St. Joseph Parish in Largo, Maryland, as an auxiliary bishop for the Archdiocese of Washington.

The appointment was announced in Washington on March 8, 2017. His episcopal ordination will be Friday, April 21, at the Cathedral of St. Matthew the Apostle in Washington.

A native of Southern Maryland, Bishop-elect Campbell, 69, was ordained a priest of the Archdiocese of Washington in 2007. Prior to becoming a priest, he was a banking official for more than 30 years.

Born Nov. 19, 1947, in Pomonkey in Charles County, Southern Maryland, to Roy Edward Campbell, Sr. and Julia Ann (Chesley) Campbell, Bishop-elect Campbell moved as a small child with his family to Washington, where he, his mother and siblings were members of the Shrine of the Sacred Heart Parish in Northwest.

A graduate of Howard University and the University of Virginia's Graduate School of Retail Bank Management, he had a 33-year career with Bank of America, working his way up from teller to vice president and project manager. In the 1980s, he served for five years on the Board of Directors of the American Lung Association of Maryland.

For the bishop-elect, the call to the priesthood is one he said that he discerned off and on for more than 50 years. In January 2003, he entered Pope St. John XXIII National Seminary in Weston, Massachusetts, to begin his priestly formation, and completed his seminary studies in 2007, graduating with a Master of Divinity degree. He was ordained to the priesthood on May 26, 2007 by Cardinal Wuerl.

Father Campbell's first parish assignment was as a parochial vicar at St. Augustine Parish in Washington from 2007 to 2008, while also taking care of the sacramental needs of Immaculate Conception Parish in Washington for six months. He was appointed pastor of Assumption Catholic Church in Southeast Washington in 2008, and in 2010 was appointed to his current assignment, as pastor of St. Joseph Parish in Largo.

For a full biography go to the Catholic Standard web site at [The Catholic Standard](http://www.catholicstandard.com)

Divine Word Missionaries is an international missionary community of over 7,000 brothers and priests. In 1905 the SVDs began working among African Americans in the Southern United States. Today, Divine Word Missionaries work in over 35 parishes in Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas and Arkansas.

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