

**Reflection on the Gospel-26th Sunday in Ordinary Time C
(Luke 16:19-31)**

-Veronica Lawson RSM

Social Justice Sunday 2016 invites us to make “a place at the table” for all and, in particular, to consider what that means in an ageing society. The gospel reading calls us to look at the wealth we enjoy as a nation, to sharpen our awareness of the needs of those who seek to share the bounty that we claim for ourselves, and to notice the poor who wait for justice at our gates and who seek a place at the table of life. The exploitative wealthy are a particular target of the Lukan Jesus: “Woe to you who are rich... (Luke 6:24).”

This Sunday’s parable presents a nasty unnamed character who is mega rich and who uses his wealth to support a totally self-centred life-style. He dresses in the finest clothes and feasts extravagantly on a daily basis. He has no concern for or interest in the destitute and badly wounded man, Lazarus, who has been cast at his gate and who longs for a share in whatever falls (‘scraps’ in our translation) from the rich man’s table. The reference here is probably to the pita bread commonly used by diners at banquets to wipe their hands. The bread would be discarded after use and snapped up by the dogs. There is a reasonable chance that, even if the servants fail to offer Lazarus the leftovers, the dogs might share with him their daily fare. Begging for food was often the sole means of sustenance for those with disabilities. Lazarus has a serious disability: he is “sorely wounded”; he is “cast” at the gate and has no capacity to prevent the dogs from licking his sores.

Lazarus dies and is transported by angels into the arms of Israel’s iconic ancestor, Abraham. In contrast, the rich man dies and suffers the torment of Hades. There is no mention of angels to transport him to the place of his ancestors. The rich man’s suffering is exacerbated by the vision of the man whose needs he ignored in life now “a long way off” in Abraham’s embrace. Earlier in Luke’s story, Jesus has declared the bent-over woman to be a daughter of Abraham. Later, he will call the toll-collector Zacchaeus a “son of Abraham”. To be “of Abraham” is to be true to the tradition inaugurated by Israel’s ancestor in faith. It is to “hear” Moses and the prophets and their call to justice and right relationship.

Riches belong, not to the few, but to the whole Earth community. If they are all-consuming, they destroy our capacity to see or hear what really matters. All the honour and status they might bring are quite worthless in the final analysis. The rich man came to this realisation a little too late. We must find a place at our tables for most vulnerable of God’s people.