

**Eighteenth Sunday after Trinity**  
**September 29, 2013**  
**Homily for the Anglican Use Mass**  
**of**  
**St. Thomas More Catholic Parish**  
**celebrated at**  
**St. Joseph Catholic Church**  
**Scranton, PA**  
**Luke 16:19-31**

Our series on what the Church teaches about laws now being passed across the country to redefine marriage in order to accommodate same-sex couples begins this Wednesday evening. One of the points I will cover has to do with the particular call each man has to fatherhood and each woman to motherhood, whether or not they have biological offspring. All men are called to fatherhood, and all women to motherhood.

I bring this up because the rich man in today's parable failed so miserably in his call to fatherhood. It is the father's role to provide for the children as well as to protect them, and we see that the rich man did neither for Lazarus. Not only did the rich man provide no food for Lazarus, Jesus adds the detail about the dogs licking his sores to indicate that the rich man did not protect Lazarus either. He was so weak and helpless from hunger that he could not keep the stray dogs off of him, and the rich man did nothing to keep them away from Lazarus, who was lying at his gate.

So the judgment upon the rich man is first that he did not fulfill his role as father, that of provider and protector. And we see then, too, that this role each man must fulfill is not restricted to his own biological offspring. Of course, the parable doesn't tell us whether the rich man had children of his own, but he is part of a family to which he felt some measure of responsibility. This is why he desires to warn his brothers about the pains of hell after his damnation. But the point here is that Lazarus was the rich man's responsibility. Both of them were sons of Abraham, as the rich man makes clear by addressing the patriarch, "Father Abraham." The rich man even recognizes that the role of the father is to provide for his children, when he asks Father Abraham to have Lazarus wet his tongue. Yet while they were on earth together, the rich man never did for his fellow son of Abraham what he was called as a man to do.

We can conclude from this parable, therefore, that we also have a responsibility to the vulnerable who are not our own children. Naturally, the hierarchy of loves requires that we ensure our own children are provided for first, but this providence cannot be at the expense of other children, nor can we undertake it while ignoring the needs of the starving children lying beside our gates.

The parable thus gives us a clue as to which vulnerable children we must care for. Note that the rich man is not condemned for his failure to care for the needs of a child in Egypt or Italy or Greece. Rather, he is condemned to eternal suffering in hell for his failure to care for Lazarus, whom he had opportunity to help every day until Lazarus finally died, so close to his home. It is the man right outside his door whom the Lord called the rich man to help.

So while we are called to help others, we do not have to go half-way around the world to find people in need of our assistance. Thus, our parish participates in efforts to aid St. Francis' Soup Kitchen, Birthright, Pennsylvanians for Human Life, and Catholic Social Services every year, so to address the material needs of our closest neighbors. When we contribute to Peter's Pence or the Church in Eastern Europe, for example, we do so in the same spirit, acknowledging the reality that the Catholic has neighbors in every corner of the globe because of our communion in Christ. Yet there can be no doubt

that our first obligation is to those corporeally closest to us. We contribute to the needs of the saints everywhere, but we look first outside our own doors.

If we earnestly attempt to meet the needs of those who suffer beside us, we can take comfort that their suffering will not be eternal. That is, we likely will not be able to eliminate hunger or protect the vulnerable from every predator, but we will not be condemned if we try to alleviate some of the pain. As we labor for the poor in this valley of tears, we look forward to the day this parable promises, when God will wipe away every tear from the eyes of those who mourn.

And we should not concern ourselves only with material poverty. While it is true that the rich man failed Lazarus in his unwillingness to provide for him and protect him, it is also true that someone else failed the rich man. Where was the teacher or pastor to remind the rich man what Moses and the prophets have to say about loving God and our neighbor? Where was the rabbi whose fatherhood could have been exercised in pointing out to the rich man his spiritual poverty? The material needs of our neighbors are important, but so are the needs of their souls.

And so we return to the illustration with which I began this morning. Whenever we undertake one of our adult education series, or even when we undertake to educate our children in Sunday School, our purpose is in meeting the spiritual needs of our neighbors. One does not need to look very far to see that many of our neighbors are living lives without understanding their purpose. They have had no one to catechize them properly, if they have been catechized at all. Many of them lack a stable family structure, and they yearn for the community that only the Church can provide. And when it comes to matters as basic and foundational as marriage, it is clear they don't know their right hand from their left. It is our role as a parish of Christ's Church to meet the needs of those living in this spiritual poverty, to see the needs of the poor as being more than food, clothing, and shelter. Indeed, many of those who have food, clothing, and shelter in abundance are the most impoverished people of all. We will likely not be able to banish ignorance, but in undertaking these education initiatives, we at least attempt to alleviate the suffering of those living in darkness. We can provide our neighbors with the truth in order to protect them from the errors of our day. Thus, I implore you to contribute to the needs of the poor. And I also encourage you to ensure you are well-equipped to address the spiritual poverty of those all around us. Come to class yourselves and get your kids to Sunday School, and ask God for the courage to invite those to come who don't even know what they're missing.