

Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading I: Amos 6:1a, 4-7
Reading II: 1 Timothy 6:11-16
Gospel: Luke 16:19-31

We have but one voice to follow. And that voice is none other than the voice of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

In his masterful words in today's Gospel, Jesus prods us with his message to "wake up!" His words make clear the relationship between this, our temporary life, and that of our soon-to-be-had eternal life. The choices we make, the words we speak, and the actions we take today have eternal consequences.

The Gospel passage today is not so much about our judging ourselves as being rich or poor, selfish or selfless, good or bad. Rather, Jesus is challenging us to "wake up" and acknowledge that gates and chasms that separate us from ourselves, from each other and from God are a very real part of our lives. But acknowledgement is only one part of this message. Our Lord's challenge also calls us to act: while we are still able to do so, we must purposely and fearlessly take ownership of the keys that govern the opening and closure of the relational gates that we, through our lives, create and sustain.

Woven throughout today's parable of the rich man and Lazarus are vivid images of divisions and separations. Jesus begins his storytelling with the image of the gate to a rich man's mansion. On one side of this barrier lies Lazarus, dressed in sores and dog spit, hungry, and unable to get up and walk. On the other side of this man-made, relational impediment we find the rich man, dressed in fine, purple, linen garments, sitting at his table feasting every day. The parable makes it clear that the keys to the lock on the mansion gate are sitting on the dining room table within the grasp of the rich man.

The story continues...Following the deaths of the parable's main characters, Jesus describes another barrier. This one, however, unlike an earthly gate that can be opened or closed at will by the human gatekeeper, is fixed, immovable and unchangeable in nature. Here our Lord refers to the barrier as a "chasm" – a deep fissure, a gaping hollow. It's an infinite breach – one that completely severs any possibility of passage from one side to the other. On one side of the chasm Lazarus now sits comforted in the bosom of Abraham. On the other side, the rich man stands tormented in the flames of Hell.

Our Gospel parable makes it clear that the heaven/hell chasm that ultimately separates the rich man from Lazarus had its beginning at the mansion gate that separated these men in this world. As part of him, the rich man carried his locked down gate with him into his chosen eternal life. As the rich man stepped from this world to the next, however, he was forced to relinquish the gate's keys to the ultimate gate keeper. This supposedly "rich" man no longer had control over who could relationally come and go through his gate.

The gates that separate and divide us in this world are not so much about external conditions of circumstances or categories – being rich or poor for instance – but rather, these gates are conditions of the human heart – our hearts over which, through the grace of God, we have control. The Gospel message is intended to call us out of our sleepy state – to "wake up!" and examine our hearts and identify the gates that separate us from ourselves, our neighbors and ultimately from God. And, once awake, we are called to act using the keys that came with the lock on our gates.

The rich man held in his heart the keys to the gate that separated him from Lazarus and from others. What gates do we lock upon ourselves? Are fear, anger, greed and selfishness, pride, prejudice, indifference, resentment, envy or hate *barriers* that we foster?

These willfully locked gates of ours block the courage, peace, generosity and selflessness, humility, tolerance, compassion, affection, contentedness and love that our Lord calls us to.

So what keeps us dazed and selfishly avoiding unlocking our gates? Perhaps lying at the foundation of our self-induced inactivity is our procrastination or our fear.

For example, at times we may not listen to and act on what God is calling us to do because we presume there will always be more time. It's easy to say to ourselves, "I know what God wants me to do but I'll face that tomorrow. Today, I'm doing what I want to do." The problem with this procrastination is that time often betrays us. Just as was the case with the rich man, time flies and for lots of reasons the healing and growth in all of our relationships that can be unlocked today might not be possible tomorrow.

Fear too plays a role in our keeping our relational keys held deep in our pockets. We may fear the unknown. If we listen to what God is asking us to do – to open the gates of our hearts to others and to

him – what might the consequences be? After all, I’m comfortable now, why not just leave well enough alone? Why risk displeasure?

Evidently from the outcome of the Gospel story, Lazarus listened to God speaking to him in his heart; he was not a fearful procrastinator. His paying attention to God’s wisdom allowed him to relinquish the keys to the gates of his heart to his Father God. And with this surrender, Lazarus won eternal life.

Our taking ownership of the God-given relational keys we’ve been entrusted with may not be easy, but it’s possible. It’s possible because we share our lives with our Eucharistic Lord who demonstrated in *his* life, death, and resurrection, that gates and yes even tombs can be opened and chasms filled.

Here’s a suggestion that may help us to remain aware of Christ’s message of hope for us. You know all those orphan keys that accumulate at the bottom of the key basket at your door...you know, the ones that you scratch your head and ask “What the heck does this open?” Today, take one of these keys, place it on your key chain, and when you next fumble across it, let it serve as a reminder of the one voice we are obliged to follow, that of Jesus Christ. Use it as a prod for yourselves to acknowledge the relational barriers that exist in your life. Let it be a reminder of the message that our Lord leaves us with today, “Wake up – set aside your procrastination and your unfounded fear – and with me let’s together open your gates.”