



The Holy See

MORNING MASS IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHA HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

"Do not fall prey to indifference"

Thursday, 12 March 2020

[Multimedia]

Introduction

Let us continue to pray together in this moment of pandemic: for the sick, for family members, for parents with children at home... But above all I would like to ask you to pray for those who govern: they must make decisions, and very often decide on measures that people do not like. But it is for our own good. And very often those in authority feel lonely and misunderstood. Let us pray for our government leaders who must make decisions on these measures: may they feel accompanied by the prayer of the people.

Homily

This account of Jesus (cf. *Lk 16:19-31*) is very clear; it may even seem like a child's story. It is very simple. Jesus wants to bring to our attention not only a story, but the possibility that all humanity might be living like this. That we too, all of us, might be living this way.

Two men, one satisfied, who knew how to dress well, who perhaps sought out the best fashion designers of the time to dress well. He wore purple and fine linen clothes. And then, he enjoyed himself, throwing lavish banquets himself for every day. He was happy like this. He was not worried. He took some precautions, maybe some cholesterol pills because of the banquets. His life was going along well like this. He was content.

There was a poor man at his door: Lazarus was his name. The rich man knew the poor man was there, he knew it, but it seemed natural to him: "I am getting along well and this man... well, that's life, you make do". At most - the Gospel does not say it - perhaps he at times sent maybe a few crumbs. And so, the life of these two men went on. And both submitted to the law that applies to us all: to die. The rich man died, and Lazarus died. The Gospel says that Lazarus was taken to Heaven, with Abraham, into the bosom of Abraham. Of the rich man, it tells us, "He was buried". Period. And there it ended (cf. v. 22).

There are two things that are striking: the fact that the rich man knew that there was this poor man and that he knew his name, Lazarus. But he didn't care, it seemed natural to him. The rich man probably even carried out his business, which in the end was against the poor. He knew very clearly, he was informed of this fact. And the second thing that touches me greatly is the phrase "great abyss" (v. 26), which Abraham says to the rich man. "Between us and you there is a great abyss: we cannot communicate, we cannot pass from one side to the other" (see v. 26). It is the same abyss that was present in life between the rich man and Lazarus: the abyss did not begin there, the abyss began here.

I have thought about what this man's problem was: the problem of being very, very informed, but with a closed heart. This rich man's information did not reach his heart, he could not be moved by the tragedy of others. He was not even able to call one of the boys who served in the kitchen and say: "Take him this, that, or the other...". The tragedy of information that doesn't penetrate the heart. This happens to us too. We all know, because we have heard it on the television news or seen it in the newspapers: how many children suffer from hunger in the world today; how many children do not have the necessary medicines; how many children cannot go to school. We know of continents affected by this tragedy: we know. "Eh, poor things...". And on we go. This information does not penetrate our heart. And many of us, many groups of men and women live in this detachment between what they think, what they know, and what they feel: the heart is detached from the mind. They are indifferent. Just as the rich man was indifferent to Lazarus's pain. There is the abyss of indifference.

On Lampedusa, when I went for the first time, this word came to mind: the globalisation of indifference. Perhaps we today, here, in Rome, are worried because it appears that the shops are closed. We have to go and buy this and that, and it seems that we can't go for a walk every day, and it seems that this...". We are worried about *our own* problems. And we forget about starving children, we forget about the poor people who are at the borders of countries, in search of freedom; these forced migrants who flee from hunger and war, and find only a wall, a wall made of iron, a wall of barbed wire, a wall that does not let them pass through. We know that this exists, but the heart does not go there, it does not penetrate. We live in indifference: indifference is the tragedy of being well-informed but not *feeling* the reality of others. This is the chasm: the chasm of indifference.

Then there is another thing that strikes us. Here we know the name of the poor man, we know it: Lazarus. Even the rich man knew it, because when he was in the underworld he asked Abraham to send Lazarus, he recognised him there: "Send Lazarus" (see v. 24). But we do not know the name of the rich man. The Gospel does not tell us what the name of this "Sir" was. He had no name. He had lost his name. He had only the adjectives of his life: rich, powerful... so many adjectives.

This is what selfishness does to us: it makes us lose our real identity, our name, and leads us to evaluate ourselves and others only in terms of adjectives. Worldliness contributes to this. We have fallen into the culture of adjectives, in which your value is what you have, what you can do, but not your name: you have lost your name. Indifference leads to this. Losing your name. We are only "the rich", we are this, we are that. We are the adjectives.

We ask the Lord today for the grace of not falling into indifference, the grace that all the information we have about human suffering might penetrate our hearts and move us to do something for others.