

Luke 16,19-31 Justice for the poor

In late 80ies a missionary in my church came to my office and explained to me how hard it was for him to preach this text to his congregants whom he considered poor while he considered himself rich. He felt that the sermon was figuring him as a rich man and his congregants as poor as Lazarus. He suggested that he preaches another text rather than this one. There was a guilt in him in presenting the topic of the rich and the poor while he thought that he was not an example for the poor. I told him not to change the text but dwell on the meaning of the text and its application then and now.

The issue of being poor or rich does not arise here. The problem was that the rich do also ignore the needs and the cry of the poor to the point where one billion people in the world sleep hungry while in the globe we a lot of food which sometimes is thrown into the dust-bin. The rich man provided for himself only. He had no care for Lazarus, even though he had the ability to help him.

Responsibility is to respond to the ability one has. So the rich man failed to respond to the ability he had of serving the poor Lazarus. The wealth we have can be a blessing or a curse depending on the way we use it for the needs of others. In most cases the wealth today is used to exercise power, it is a tool for self-pleasure rather than a tool to care and to serve others. Wealth and material, if are not careful, can turn our focus toward our own enjoyment as it happened to the rich fool as in Luke 12,13-21. His focus was centred to his pleasure and enjoyment. He never cared for others. Money and wealth are excellent tools when put in the right use. The rich man did consume his wealth only for himself. He never tried to improve the well-being of Lazarus.

Right use of our wealth for the benefit of others is a sacred stewardship which means we use what God has given us to improving the living standard of others whom we consider poor. **God is the one who owns everything for he has created the universe and everything in it. All what we have is a gift. None of us owns this world with all of its resources. But we owe our Lord and Creator to share these gifts of God which are given to us. This is our christian stewardship.** Our resources are not to be privately held and consumed. They have to be used as a means of generosity, as the case of the Good Samaritan and Zachaeus. Our Lord Jesus Christ commanded us to love one another not by feeling only but by acting upon the needs of our neighbours.

The strangest thing in today's text is: the rich man is not named. He is nameless because he represents the dangers of wealth. He could be anyone, anywhere. "Lazarus" is the name derived from Hebrew Eliezer which means "God helps" Lazarus himself expected God to help him through the response of the rich man. But the rich man did not respond. The text is calling us to take our chance in doing good or responding to the needs of others now. The rich man never took that chance. Later he suffered.

Lazarus represents the needy today which are categorically known to us. These are the refugees, the unemployed, the elderly, the widows and orphans, homeless, the lonely and generally the people who have no access to social needs. In Kenya we have more than 500000 refugees in our camps. It is our responsibility with the help of international community to support them fully. As you face the problem of refugees influx in Europe you need to know it is your responsibility to use your big resources to care and resettle the refugees and the needy as we are doing in Kenya with the little we have. It is a biblical call to help and care for the needy around us.

This parable is not mainly about money, is not mainly about our wealth. It is about the roots of our own hearts. We need to know what nourishes these roots. Are our roots tied to earthly treasure? Are we busy to notice the screams of human despair? Do our roots minister for the comfort of the world - or the pain of the world? The parable exposes our values: values for life and enjoyment without considering others. Do we have values of sacrifice and sharing with others? The destiny of our life is determined by our services we render to others (Mathew 25).

(I was hungry, you gave me food. I was thirsty, you gave me water. I was sick and in prison, you visited me. And now I am a refugee, you give me a shelter.)

The world today is divided into the same categories as in the text. We have the category of the rich who do not respond and apply justice to the poor. Their roots are deep into investment and profit making at the expense of the poor. It is shameful when governments extend aid and shelter to the refugees and others complain about the burden they bear in helping the needy in their midst.

The bible text is calling us to take our position. Either we take the position of ignoring or complaining about the status of the world full of poor people and refugees without responding to their needs. Or we take an active position in responding to the needs of others in whatever direction. If we know that it is right to engage in assisting others and still ignore this, then we are not doing justice to the poor whom Jesus said they are always with us and always to be assisted.

AMEN.