

**“Lazarus, forgive me.” (Homily)**

Deacon John Fulton, St. Kevin Roman Catholic Church, Warwick, Rhode Island  
September 29, 2019 -- Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time -- Luke 16:19-31

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“And lying at his door was a poor man named Lazarus.”

I knew Lazarus.

I knew him, as did many of my friends at the university. We called him “the dove.” How he got that nickname, I never knew, but it stuck. To this day, if you ask my old classmates “Do you remember the dove?” they will respond, “Wasn’t he the homeless man who used to sit quietly on benches around the campus? The one who wore olive green, and carried a big, green duffel bag?” Indeed he was!

And he *never* spoke; he *never* smiled.

The dove was a master at survival. His favorite campgrounds were construction sites, into which he would turn after dark, and from which he would emerge early in the morning, before the day’s work began. Somehow, he kept himself going, on other people’s refuse, mostly, but also by means of the coins people would occasionally place next to him, as he rested on a bench, or a wall, or his duffel, making the best of whatever sun God had provided him that day.

Everyone had a theory about him: He was mentally ill. He was rich, but eccentric. He was a veteran whose nerves had been shattered by war, a swamp yankee whose cabin had burned down, an old sailor. He had lost his wife and children in a tragic accident, and so on. Everyone talked *about* him, but no one talked *with* him. We felt sorry for him, of course, but we passed him by, secure in ourselves, our achievements, our dreams. We passed him by, *our* Lazarus, every single one of us.

That is, except for one man, as I observed one bleak November day.

It was getting on to be mid-morning, and I was on my way to give a lecture. The morning was abnormally raw, even for November, and I decided to stop on my way to grab a cup of coffee and give my lecture notes the once-over. I headed to the little cafe where my friend Frank Del Matto presided, arriving just as the last of the breakfast crowd was leaving. Settling into my usual corner, I was greeted with an exuberant “*Giovanni!*” and a steaming mug of black coffee. After the usual back-and-forth with Frank, I took out my lecture notes, and began editing.

Now, exuberant greetings from Frank were the norm in that little cafe, and so I didn’t raise my head when the next “*Bonjour, mon ami!*” reverberated through the place. Neither did I lift my head when Frank yelled, “*The usual? Good!*” and, after a few minutes, “*Voilà!*” Nevertheless, I *did* look when I heard a person say, very softly, “Thank you very much!”

It was the dove. It was the dove, indeed!

Frank was fussing over him as if he were royalty, and the dove *smiled*; the dove *spoke*.

Not wishing to intrude, I put my head back down, and buried myself in my notes. After a short while, I heard the dove get up, say "Good-bye" very softly, and leave. Turning to Frank, I saw him *beaming*. He went to the table where the dove had eaten, picked up a quarter, walked back to the cash register, and recorded a sale of twenty-five cents: quite a discount for a full breakfast, even in those days!

With a sense of wonder, I got up, said "Good-bye" to Frank, and pondered the miracle I had just witnessed: Lazarus had *spoken*, had *smiled*, had *expressed heart-felt thanks!* And Frank had evoked it with *so little*: a warm "Hello," a couple of eggs, a few gestures of respect.

Frank. Francis. *Saint* Francis. My mind wandered as I walked across campus. What did it all mean? Were miracles so simple? How many miracles had I hindered by my self-absorption? How many times had Lazarus lay at *my* door? How many times had I passed him by, without so much as a "Hello?"

As I reached the lecture hall, I was struck with an impulse. Swinging the door wide for several people, I said in my best deep voice, "*Bon jour, mes amis! Après vous!*"

The smiles my gesture provoked warmed the rest of my day.

Lazarus, forgive me.

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### **Luke 16:19-31**

Jesus said to the Pharisees:

"There was a rich man who dressed in purple garments and fine linen and dined sumptuously each day.

And lying at his door was a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who would gladly have eaten his fill of the scraps that fell from the rich man's table.

Dogs even used to come and lick his sores.

When the poor man died, he was carried away by angels to the bosom of Abraham.

The rich man also died and was buried, and from the netherworld, where he was in torment, he raised his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side.

And he cried out, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me.

Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am suffering torment in these flames.'

Abraham replied,  
'My child, remember that you received  
what was good during your lifetime  
while Lazarus likewise received what was bad;  
but now he is comforted here, whereas you are tormented.  
Moreover, between us and you a great chasm is established  
to prevent anyone from crossing who might wish to go  
from our side to yours or from your side to ours.'  
He said, 'Then I beg you, father,  
send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers,  
so that he may warn them,  
lest they too come to this place of torment.'  
But Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the prophets.  
Let them listen to them.'  
He said, 'Oh no, father Abraham,  
but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.'  
Then Abraham said, 'If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets,  
neither will they be persuaded if someone should rise from the dead.'"