



# THE MISSION OF SAINT MARY MAGDALENE

## Father Alan's Blog

### For the First Sunday After Trinity – June 6, 2021

*“Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God, and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.”*

1 St. John 4:7 (KJV)

Bucharest, Romania has one of the world's largest and most opulent palaces, built to be the private residence of then communist dictator, and General Secretary of the Romanian Communist Party, Nicolae Ceaușescu. Boasting impressive gardens, grand ballrooms, and banquet halls, along with massive chandeliers and expensive carpets, it took thousands of workers years to build and consumed a significant portion of Romania's Gross Domestic Product in the process. **(All of this in one of the world's poorer countries.)** To secure the land for the palace, many homes and businesses were confiscated and demolished. Even so, across the new plaza from the new palace there were the bleak houses of the poor people of Bucharest. As a result, General Secretary Ceaușescu ordered that façades of attractive buildings be constructed in front of them – so that he would not have to look at the homes of the poor.



It can be **unpleasant** to see the suffering of others. For example:

- † when we are healthy, we may prefer not to look at those who are sick;
- † when we are young, we may want to avoid those who are old;
- † when we are rich, we may choose to steer clear of those who are poor;
- † when we are comfortable, we may not like to be around those who are in pain; and
- † when we are of a particular skin colour and privilege, we may not like to even think about those who are not.

Indeed, “out of sight out of mind” seems to be the “go-to strategy” for those trying to avoid the **unpleasantness** of seeing too much (or any) suffering. Even so, Trinity season encourages us to consider how we might grow in holiness and to live out our Christian lives daily in as practical a fashion as possible, given the constant challenges that we face from “the world, the flesh, and the devil.” Bearing this in mind, the theme for today, “The First Sunday after Trinity,” is “Love of God and Love of Man.”

In today’s Epistle Lesson (1 St. John 4:7-21), St. John tells us that God’s own love for humankind is the both the basis and the means of all love we offer back to Him. In other words, we are only able to love God **because He loved us first**. Moreover, we demonstrate this true love of (and for) God through deeds of kindness to our fellow human beings. To accomplish this, not only must we be born again of the Spirit (as we heard Jesus inform Nicodemus in last week’s Gospel Lesson from St. John 3:1-15), we must allow that same Holy Spirit to work within us throughout our entire earthly lives.

To this end, a friend of mine – who happened to be an Augustinian friar – once told me:

*“The Holy Spirit is a gentleman; He won’t come in until He’s invited.”*

Indeed, there's a most beautiful and telling painting by William Holman Hunt called, "The Light of the World" which depicts our Lord Jesus Christ holding a lantern and standing outside a door. It is the artist's interpretation of a single verse of Holy Scripture (namely, Revelation 3:20a) which reads:

*"Behold, I stand at the door and knock."*

Upon closer inspection of the painting, one can see that the door has no knob - **meaning that it can only be open from the INSIDE**. The point is this: we alone make the choice to open the doors of our hearts and willingly allow Jesus Christ, through His Holy Spirit, to dwell fully and lovingly within us. St. John (in 4:10a of his First General Epistle, that is, today's Epistle Lesson) makes it abundantly clear that God is the source of all such love when he writes:

*"Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us..."*

This truth is echoed in our Collect for today in which we admit that:

*"...through the weakness of our mortal nature we can do no good thing without thee..."*

But here's the kicker: with God's unfathomable love (which was shown to us in and through Jesus Christ) dwelling in our hearts, all things are possible and so we continue to pray in our Collect:

*"...grant us the help of thy grace..."*

for it is only when we receive the grace and the love of God, that we are truly able to love one another.

Conversely, today's Gospel Lesson (St. Luke 16:19-31) speaks of the inevitable consequence of rejecting God's Love and of ignoring the plight of our fellow humans. Jesus tells a story - a very pointed, and

powerful, and **uncomfortable** story. The story is a parable not history (in other words, Jesus made up the story in order to teach His listeners important spiritual truths). This is only one of many parables that Jesus taught but it is different from all the rest because this is the only parable in which Jesus uses **a person's name**. Somehow, it makes the plight of the poor sick man more personal because Jesus gives him a name. Jesus intentionally starts His parable (in verse 19) as follows:

*“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury everyday.”*

Although the rich man had it all, Jesus does not mention him by name, which is a curiosity all by itself because usually in life we know the names of the rich but not the names of the poor. For instance:

- ‡ **Who are the *richest* people in North America?**
- ‡ **Who are the *poorest* people in North America?**

In Jesus' story the poor man is known **by name** (“Lazarus”), while the rich man is known only **by wealth**. It is, to say the least, an interesting **contrast** that Jesus establishes from the very outset of His story.

In any event, the rich man, we are told, wore very expensive clothes. (Purple and fine linen were so costly that it would have taken a year or more of the average worker's wages to buy **just one outfit**.) The wealthy man in Jesus' parable did not dress for modesty, or for comfort, no – he deliberately dressed **to look rich**. You might say that his wardrobe fit today's description of “conspicuous consumption.” Furthermore, Jesus' assertion that the man “lived in luxury every day” more literally means that he “feasted daily.” (Try to imagine a gourmet smorgasbord with the most exotic food available – **as a daily routine**.) Without a doubt, this man was extremely wealthy, and he lived the lifestyle of the “rich and famous.”

It is important to note that Jesus does not criticize the man's wealth; in

fact, Jesus does not condemn his lifestyle at all. Now, Jesus **could** have (some might say that Jesus **should** have) but that was not the point Jesus was trying to make; rather, it had to do with the rich man's relationship (or lack thereof) to the poor man, Lazarus. At any rate, Jesus continues His account in verses 20-21:

*"At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores."*

Jesus offers no explanation why one man was so rich and comfortable while the other was so poor and miserable. The reason why does not seem to matter to Jesus – according to His story, **it is just the way things were**. Perhaps, Jesus does not say why because He is more concerned about **what we do** than **how it happened**. No doubt, that is why Jesus gives the beggar the name "Lazarus," the Latin form of the Hebrew name "Eleazer" which means "God is my help" because that is what God does best – HE HELPS. Now, granted, there were probably many days when Lazarus did not think that God was all that helpful. For as we heard, he was sick, and covered with sores, and even the dogs took pity on him and licked his sores. Seriously – could anything sound more pathetic or, perhaps, more disgusting?!? In reality, though, the dogs would have promoted healing by licking Lazarus' wounds, because dog saliva contains an antibacterial enzyme called "lysozyme." In addition, stimulating the skin around Lazarus' wounds through licking would increase healing blood flow to the affected area. (How often, say, do we see dogs licking their own wounds to ease the pain and to encourage healing?) Thus, Jesus' very grim and most telling point is this: **by licking Lazarus' wounds, these dogs were the only ones on God's Earth who showed him any compassion.**

Moreover, Jesus relates (in verse 21a) that homeless, helpless, and hungry Lazarus longed for the scraps which fell from the rich man's

table. (In those days, people did not eat with knives and forks; rather, people ate with their fingers. Consequently, the ultra-rich used pieces of bread to wipe their hands during and after eating. And then, **they just threw the bread on the floor**. Such were the scraps that Lazarus hoped to retrieve and eat.)

It is a pathetic portrait of **extremes**: the richest and the poorest, the heights of luxury and the depths of misery. Now, the sin of the rich man was not that he was rich. He did not **withhold** food from Lazarus. He did not **chase** Lazarus away from his gate. He did not **make** Lazarus' life more miserable. He did not **cause** Lazarus to be poor or sick in the first place. The rich man did nothing **wrong**. But that is the whole point: **He did NOTHING**. His sin was that **he did not care**. If the rich man were here today, he would probably not know any poor people personally. Oh, he might observe that the poor all seem to have cell phones, and cigarettes, and regular government handouts, so they must be doing "just fine." But he would not be at all concerned that they have substandard housing, unpotable drinking water, poor diets, and cannot get jobs that pay a fair wage. He would not care that groceries are more expensive in the poorest parts of our city or in our country's north, or that neither Native reserve schools nor Native reserve healthcare clinics ever have enough money or supplies. He would not be **against** the poor. He just would not **think about them**. He just would not **notice**. He just would not **care**. And so, he would do **nothing**.

The second scene to Jesus' story unfolds in verses 22-31. Both men have died. (Death comes equally to the poor and to the rich, as sooner or later we all physically die.) In Jesus' parable, the afterlife is divided into two parts: one part is **hell**, the place of "torment" **for the unrighteous**; and the other part is **paradise** the place of "pleasure" **for the righteous**. And Jesus tells His listeners that after death – that is, in the afterlife – the roles are reversed. The rich man who once lived in luxury is now in misery. He is now poor and pathetic. He is now

tormented and in constant misery. He yearns for a drop of water from Lazarus' finger to cool his tongue and to ease his pain, even if it is only for a second or two. The once-rich man sees everything differently now (**as he now knows Lazarus by name, for instance**). He now wants a connection to the man whom he did not even notice when he was alive on Earth but who is now clutched to Abraham's bosom. Yet, Jesus continues (in verse 25), that Abraham – the father of the Jewish people, and, by extension, the father of all faithful people on Earth – informs the once-rich man that it is **too late**:

**Lazarus cannot help him,**

**Because their eternal destinies were fixed the moment they died.**

Perhaps finally “seeing the light,” the once-rich man then makes a second request (in verses 27-28) – not for himself, mind you, but, rather, for his five brothers still living in their father's home on Earth:

*“Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.”*

Regardless, Abraham points out (in verse 29a) that they have been given all the warnings they need in:

*“...Moses and the Prophets...”*

(that is, the Old Testament Scriptures).

Finally, to top it all off, Abraham intimates to the once-rich man (in verse 31) that if, somehow, someone could rise from the dead and be sent back to warn people, they would still not pay attention to anything he said – because for those who are truly hard-hearted, **resurrection means NOTHING.**

In sharpest contrast, Lazarus who once was poor, is now “rich” (in terms of what the eternal afterlife has to offer). To be sure, he is now far better off and there is no way that he would ever want – **for ANY reason** – to return to the miserable life he once knew on Earth.

Indeed, Lazarus who once was sick now is well.

Lazarus who once lived in misery now lives in luxury.

And Lazarus, “Eleazar,” “God is my Help,” who once had only dogs for friends, is now the friend of Father Abraham.

When we read this parable, I hope it is easy to see that in many ways each of us is the rich man. We have all been given so much and, at times, it becomes all-too easy for us to ignore those who have so little. Truly, there are many lessons here for us to “mark, learn, and inwardly digest.” Yet, these four, in particular, came readily to mind this past week:

- 👍 **Have personal concern for others who are poor, sick, miserable, and needy.**
- 👍 **Love your neighbour know HIS name, see HER need, help THEM out.**
- 👍 **Today connects to eternity; our eternal destiny depends on the choices we freely make in this life.**
- 👍 **We have all been given adequate warning – God has already told us in the Bible everything we need to know about how to live today and how to prepare for eternity.**

In other words, then:

*“Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God, and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.”*





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