

26th Sunday, 2007

1. Do you remember that scene in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark where a woman comes in with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment, pure nard, breaks the jar and pours the costly ointment over the Lord's head, and some of those present complain because of the waste and say: "This ointment could have been sold for a great deal of money which could then have been given to the poor." But the Lord answered: Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing for me. For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you wish, you can do good to them, but you will not always have me. She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for burying" (Mk 14:3-10).

2. "She has done a beautiful thing for me." What a truly wonderful sentence from the lips of the Lord. He can see a gesture which others considered wasteful to be beautiful because of the circumstances in which it took place. He was near death, and she was anointing him. And how right the Lord's words are about the poor. They are always with us. He was also right about this woman's extravagant action, for he says here: "And truly I say to

you, wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her.”

3. This week and last week our readings from the prophet Amos, the prophet of social justice, and from Luke’s gospel are rubbing our noses into the message that our lives with God have to concern themselves with the way we use our goods, our possessions, our money. Our money must serve our spiritual growth. It must not challenge it, for we cannot serve both it and God. We must rather make it serve God. Money can easily become a substitute God which people then adore. We cannot allow that to happen to us. And so, as last week’s parable told us, we must be as prudent in our use of money as the dishonest steward was who provided for himself by reducing the debts of his master’s debtors so that they would help him when he became jobless. And today’s parable of the rich man and the poor man Lazarus at his door has two messages for us: we must care for the poor, and we must do so here and now because after our deaths we will be judged by what we did for the poor during our lives.

4. The thought has often occurred to me that this rich man might not have seen Lazarus at his door. But just a moment’s reflection tells me that that cannot be the case. Lazarus was at his door. He

had to step over him to get out his door. Therefore, he cannot have been totally unaware of his presence there. But he could have said to himself: I can't help this fellow. He would just come back for more. And why doesn't he help himself? He could even have used the sentence which we have just heard from the lips of Jesus: The poor are always with you. In short, the rich man did see Lazarus, but for one reason or another he excused himself from helping him.

5. Brothers and sisters, nothing has changed in the past three thousand years. From the time of the prophet Amos, who lived in the 700s before our Lord, until now the situation is the same. There are some who live sumptuously; there are others who live in need. And most of us say to ourselves: that is the way it has always been; that is the way it will always be; and there is nothing to be done about it. Case is closed!

6. But that is not a Christian response. The Christian response is to help those in need. So let us do that. And if we need a little shove to do that, we can remind ourselves of the fact that on the day of judgment, we will be judged by our concern for the poor. When I was hungry, you gave me to eat; when I was thirsty you gave me to drink.

7. This morning, if you exit by the main door of our church and look to the right, you will see that there is a little niche down below which offers a bit of protection from the elements. Until this past week it was occupied each night by a man. There is no shelter here in Woonsocket for homeless men from April 1 to November 1. If you were here last week, you heard the story of Mayor Fiorello La Guardia of NYC who fined every person in a law court where a poor man was on trial for stealing some bread to feed his family 50 cents for living in a city where a poor man had to steal to feed his family. Should we do the same? Should we fine ourselves for living in the city of Woonsocket which has no shelter for homeless men for half the year?