

The Rich Man and Lazarus

It is a parable from Luke, and parables in the four Gospels are stories made by Jesus and were not told before among people. He pictures in this parable a rich man and a poor one. The rich dresses in purple and fine linen, i.e. silk, and “lived in luxury every day”. Obscene richness is through dressing, food, shelter and furniture.

The evangelist pictures next to him a poor man thrown on his gate. He was thrown because he had sores. He was always hungry and dogs used to come and lick his sores. We are in front of a severe illness that exposes the sick person to living with animals. His name is Lazarus, which means “God is our aid or assistance”. Perhaps Luke gave him this name to indicate that the poor has no one but God.

“The angels carried him to Abraham’s side”. This is an expression for Jews that refers to living in the Kingdom. Therefore, the poor man was among God’s companions. The Evangelist wanted to say that God gives the poor their sustenance and he is their aider.

Then the text says that the rich man “dies and was buried”. And Luke said that he is in hell, and in the language of the Old Testament, hell is the Kingdom of death, and Luke clarified that he is in torment. The Evangelist doesn’t say why he is in torment, but from what was already written in the biblical text we understand that because he didn’t have any compassion towards the poor man and didn’t notice him thrown in front of the gate of his palace. This rich man looked towards Abraham and saw the poor man by his side. He desired to be in the Kingdom but he couldn’t cancel the punishment that he deserved in his world, and the writer clarified that by saying: “between us and you a great chasm has been set in place”. He wished that his fellow rich people would change their behavior through receiving a messenger from heaven. This man requested that from Abraham who receives in his bosom the sons of the Kingdom.

The answer was straight: “They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them”. By “Moses and the Prophets” he refers to the books of the Old Testament that teach mercy and how man is saved through it not because God, in his nature, is a severe punisher but because sin punishes the sinner and denies him from seeing God and from being in communion with the Saints. Luke was very clear in what he said concerning the rich man and his friends: “If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead”.

We are tested through our love that we show in this world. If it existed in us on earth, it shall stay in the soul that God takes back to him, and the love that stays in us is our salvation. Love is first to see the other and his needs and to make him feel that he is a brother and that he owns what we have. He is a partner in what we

own. It is his right. If we gained a fortune, we are responsible for it not for the sake of our pleasures but through confessing that it is a credit for all the people that are with us and around us since it is not acceptable for someone to stay without any food, clothes and shelter.

What we own is not for our service alone. It is for all the brothers and especially for the needy as we are God's delegates for their service so that we glorify God through what we gave and they glorify him through what they took.

Metropolitan George of Mount Lebanon