

**Reflection on the Gospel-26th Sunday in Ordinary Time C  
(Luke 16:19-31)**

-Veronica Lawson RSM

The theme of the 2019-2020 Social Justice Statement is “making it real: genuine human encounter in a digital world.” It calls us to ensure that the new digital technology facilitates rather than inhibits the spread of the gospel. The gospel reading invites us to look at the wealth we enjoy, to sharpen our awareness of the needs of those who seek to share the bounty we claim for ourselves, to notice the poor who wait for justice at our gates and seek a part in the life we enjoy. This inclusive embrace is the vision we espouse in this final week of the Season of Creation.

The gospel parable presents a nasty mega rich character using his wealth to support a totally self-centred life-style. He dresses in the finest clothes and feasts extravagantly every day. He has no concern for or interest in the destitute and badly wounded man, Lazarus, who has been cast at his gate and who longs for a share in whatever falls (‘scraps’ in our translation) from the rich man’s table. The reference here is probably to the pita bread commonly used by diners at banquets to wipe their hands. The bread would be discarded after use and snapped up by the dogs. There is a reasonable chance that, even if the servants fail to offer Lazarus the leftovers, the dogs might share with him their daily fare. Begging for food was often the sole means of sustenance for those with disabilities. Lazarus has a serious disability: he is “sorely wounded”; he is “cast” at the gate and has no capacity to prevent the dogs from licking his sores.

Lazarus dies and is transported by angels into the arms of Israel’s iconic ancestor, Abraham. In contrast, the rich man dies and suffers the torment of Hades. There is no mention of angels to transport him to the place of his ancestors. The rich man’s suffering is exacerbated by the vision of the man whose needs he ignored in life now “a long way off” in Abraham’s embrace. Earlier in Luke’s story, Jesus has declared the bent-over woman to be a daughter of Abraham. Later, he will call the toll-collector Zacchaeus a “son of Abraham”. To be “of Abraham” is to be true to the tradition inaugurated by Israel’s ancestor in faith. It is to “hear” Moses and the prophets and their call to justice and right relationship.

Riches belong, not to the few, but to the whole Earth community. If they are all-consuming, they destroy our capacity to see or hear what really matters. All the honour and status they might bring are quite worthless in the final analysis. The rich man came to this realisation too late. The occasional period of digital detox might provide us with time to reflect and to restore the balance required for the health of all on our planet.