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Reminder: God made the world for all, not for a few

by Thomas Gumbleton

The Peace Pulpit

If we listen carefully to these readings, they are very challenging to us, especially when we live in a culture that so holds up riches as the goal of our life very often. But it's really, in a way, quite unusual how these Scriptures are so timely because of what is happening in our world at this very moment. We live in a period of time in our country where what Amos was picturing in that first lesson seems literally true.

See, Amos confronted a situation where there were a few people who lived in just extreme luxury. When you listen carefully to his description, it brings it out: "You lie on beds inlaid with ivory; straw on your couches. You eat lamb from the flock and veal from calves." See, they don't even wait for the lamb to grow up. They eat the lamb before it can reproduce and the calves because they have so much; they don't care.

"You strum on your hearts and, like David, try out new musical instruments. You drink wine by the bowlful; that seems incredible." Now he's just trying to say that everything is upside down in our country, remember, a couple of years ago, we had the Occupy Wall Street. Well because the readings are so much. The gap is constantly increasing in this country but also throughout the world.

One-fifth of the world's people have the vast majority of the world's wealth; the bottom fifth, almost nothing. It's a scandalous situation, and it's present in our world right now. Amos could have said those words in this country and to the rich throughout the world. So what he says is very timely, and he's warning them: Having that much wealth is not right. It's not right. God made the world for everyone so that every person could share in the goods of the earth that God gave to all -- every person could have a full human life -- but we don't allow that to happen.

What happens in the parable is not so much that the rich man -- he doesn't get a name, whereas the poor

man is called Lazarus. Luke is giving us a hint there who is really important. We don't know the name of the poor people sitting at the edge of our freeway ramps, do we? We know the name of Bill Gates, richest man in our country (or one of them). But in this parable, Luke is giving us a hint who is favored by God.

Lazarus has a name; God knows Lazarus. The rich man is just called the rich man, Dives, but the main problem with the rich man [is that] actually he does know Lazarus' name. When he's in torment, he's asking Abraham, "Send Lazarus." He knows who Lazarus is; he knows he was at his gate every day-- covered with sores, dogs licking his wounds, without clothing, without food -- but he ignored him, and that, too, is timely.

A short time ago, you may remember, Pope Francis (among one of the surprises that he seems to keep producing), on the spur of the moment, went to visit a town just off the coast of Italy on an island called Lampedusa, where a rickety boat bringing refugees from North Africa was trying to come across. The boat capsized and fell apart, and 19 people were drowned and others were injured. The pope went there right away. He just left everything he was doing and went so that he could give comfort to the people who were survivors; [so that] he could bless those who had died [and] pray for them.

But then he also preached a homily while he was there, and in this article, it says, "The pope blasted ... he cried ... called out against what he" -- these are his words -- "The globalization of indifference that is widespread among too many others." The globalization of indifference -- see, we have four-fifths of the world's people in poverty, and how many of us really care? We have an ever-increasing number of people in poverty in this country, and how many of us even care?

Our economy is globalized so that it works that fewer and fewer get more and more and more, and more get less and less, but do we care? Well, if it affects us, we probably do, but we don't think about all those being afflicted. Pope Francis says, "We have forgotten how to cry." See, our hearts don't get disturbed at the sufferings of the poor, and in fact, you know it works just the opposite.

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Do we believe -- well, we don't have to believe, we know it's a fact -- our House of Representatives meeting right now in Washington, trying to come up with a budget for our country because we're going to run out of money Monday night at midnight if we don't make some changes. We haven't had any budget for a while, but they're trying to in that budget, if it were to pass the way the House of Representatives wants it, cut out \$4 billion a year in food stamps. Over the next 10 years, \$40 billion is eliminated.

At the same time, \$50 billion -- \$5 billion a year -- is put into this budget to subsidize farmers who don't even live on the land. Can you believe it -- 18,000 people in this country get subsidies as farmers when they're not farming? Yet we want to take money from the poor because the people on food stamps, they're not people who are lazy and don't care about trying to survive well; they're people that can't get jobs.

The majority are children, or they're mentally ill people, many of them veterans on the streets. Where's our sense of compassion and concern? Why aren't we shouting out at those in Congress? See, they don't want to pass the budget unless it takes away the possibility of health care for 40 million people who don't have it right now. What's wrong?

This parable and the words of Amos really should speak to us today to remind us that again, God made the world for all, not for a few. Everyone has a right to a full human life. Everyone has a right to what you need to live: food, water, clothing, shelter, health care and education. Those are rights that we have

because God made us and God made us in God's image -- we're human beings made in the image of God.

God wants everyone to have a full human life, and if we really are followers of Jesus and we're listening to his parables today and the last three Sundays, every one of them has been about this same thing: how God loves the poor. God reaches out to the poor. God hears the cries of the poor. If we turn our eyes away from them, close our ears, become indifferent -- well, you heard the parable today: Dives ends up in hell, and Lazarus is at the right hand of God.

See, that's the consequences, and it's not so much that God is going to punish us. It's rather, as Abraham says to the rich man, "Look! Now there's this chasm. You weren't interested in the poor when you were in life in the world. Now it's impossible to reach across to the poor. You've done it to yourself; you cut yourself off from where God is because God is with the poor."

So if we really listen again deeply and challenge ourselves to make some changes in our everyday life to share what we have, to try to make sure that our public policies don't hurt the poor. And we need to do what St. Paul says to Timothy, for he says, "Indeed, the love of money is the root of every evil. Because of this greed, some have wandered away from the faith."

But then he says to Timothy, "But you, friend of God, shun all that; strive to be holy and godly, live in faith and love with endurance and gentleness. And now in the presence of God who gives life to all things and of Jesus who expressed before Pontius Pilate the authentic profession of faith, you preserve for yourself the revealed message God gives to all: Keep yourself holy and blameless until the glorious coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Paul's words are spoken to each of us today, and if we listen to those words and follow them, we'll know what to do about the poor and the hungry, the homeless in our midst.

[Homily given at St. Hilary Parish, Redford, Mich. The transcripts of Bishop Gumbleton's homilies are posted weekly to NCRonline.org. Sign up here to receive an email alert when the latest homily is posted.]

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