



## SAINT LOUIS ABBEY



Fr. Paul Kidner's Homily  
26th Ordinary Sunday, 2007

What was the sin of the rich man in this parable? He had not ordered Lazarus to be removed from his gate. He had no objection to Lazarus receiving the crumbs that fell from his table as he and his guests discarded the bread on which they had wiped their hands. His sin was that he accepted Lazarus as part of the landscape, that he thought it perfectly natural that others should lie in poverty while he wallowed in luxury. He did not do anything wrong; he did nothing. Apparently, he did not even pray for the less fortunate, at least there is no indication that he did.

This vivid parable strikes home to people of every age. Jesus did not condemn wealth, only the irresponsible, self-serving use of wealth; and this theme is echoed in our Old Testament reading from the prophet Amos: "Woe to the complacent in Zion! ... stretched comfortably on their couches ... they drink wine from bowls. ... They shall be the first to go into exile, and their wanton revelry shall be done away with." How do we keep alive our consciousness of the needs of the poorest and most destitute of God's people and discover how we are meant to help them? The new twist that we find at the end of the parable sheds some light on this question. Different from all the other gospel passages about the responsible use of wealth, there is added to this parable the dialog between the rich man and Abraham, and this is where the real point of the parable lies. The rich man asks that Lazarus be allowed to convey a special warning to his five brothers who are still living. The answer is that they have the word of Scripture and that is enough. Those who are unmoved by the message of Scripture will not be convinced by a miracle either. That is Jesus special point in telling this parable. Those who are unmoved by the message of Scripture will not be convinced by a miracle either.

In his Rule for Monks, St. Benedict stresses *Lectio Divina*, which is a bit difficult to translate and capture its full meaning. It is the prayerful reading of scripture. St. Benedict lived long before the age of printing; each person did not have his own copy of the Bible. It was necessary to memorize passages of Scripture. So *Lectio Divina* was the rumination upon passages of scripture which had been memorized, a sort of chewing over the Word of God to digest more and more fully its deeper meaning. And St. Benedict saw this as a stimulus to private prayer, to coming closer to the mind of Jesus and knowing his will for us. This is how Benedict would have understood the response in today's parable that we have the Word of Scripture and that is sufficient. This prayerful rumination of memorized passages of scripture was not incompatible with the accomplishment of routine daily tasks. It was a way of remaining in the presence of God throughout the day. If we gain a familiarity with important passages of scripture, a familiarity which borders on memorization, and prayerfully chew over these words, this will keep alive our consciousness of the needs of the less fortunate among God's people and we shall not incur the condemnation of the rich man who thought nothing of Lazarus' plight and ignored it until it was too late.