

This parable raises two questions: Why did the poor man, Lazarus, go to heaven? Why was the rich man condemned?

Let's take a look at the first question, concerning the hellish fate of the rich man. We are not told he acquired his wealth by foul means. In fact we are not even told that Lazarus begged from him and he refused to help. All we are told is that he was well fed and had nice clothing, like most of us here.

+A number of years back there was a poll taken from Catholics about their eternal destination. 83% of those polled said that they would go to heaven as they are now. What was their reason for saying so? Answers ranged like this, "Well, I didn't kill anyone. I haven't abused anyone. I haven't stolen anything." Wow, that is raising the bar!

Imagine this scene: A few of these 83% arrives before the Judgment Seat of God. The divine Judge goes through the Book of Life and does not find some of their names. So He announces to them that it looks like you're in the wrong place." They protests, "But what did I do? I didn't kill anyone! I did nothing!" "Precisely," replies God, "that is why you're getting booted, because you did absolutely nothing."

This is what happens to the rich man. He was lost because he knew of the sufferings of the Lazarus and did nothing to help him. He was NOT condemned for having money. He was condemned for hoarding money. The rich man failed to have a relationship with God because he failed to see God in his blessings and in the needs of Lazarus.

He had the means, but did not do what he was capable of doing. We started out Mass with the penitential rite, "I confess Almighty God...In what I have done and failed to do." What I have failed to do. What I have allowed to go on without giving any concern for it.

*Mind you this is not a guilt trip for those hitting you up for money. At the time of Jesus, there was nothing in place for the poor. If you want to help the homeless give to an organization that will assist them.

The 2nd question: Why did Lazarus go to heaven? After all we are not told that much about him. Nor can we simply say he went to heaven because he was poor. Some people have suggested that in the next life there will be an automatic reversal of status: the rich will become poor and the poor will become rich.

But this is not the point of the parable. Rich people who use their wealth to serve God in their fellow human beings will still be blessed in the next life. Poor people who spend their lives lying or stealing may yet again suffer in the next life.

+A favorite of old TV sitcoms was “Cheers” with Sam, Woody, Norm, and Cliff. The theme song of the show is, “Where everybody knows your name.” The refrain is, “You wanna go where everyone knows your name.” Few things are as reassuring as being recognized by name.

There is a detail in this gospel parable that should not be missed, as it answers the reason for Lazarus’ heavenly journey. The poor man has a name, Lazarus, while the rich man has no name. This is the only gospel parable in which a character is given a personal name. There is a reason for this, a message in this for us to be aware.

The name Lazarus, means “God is my help.” The poor man is known to God personally, by name. He had a relationship with God. They were, as we say, on a first-name basis.

Lazarus was rewarded because his poverty brought him closer to God. Despite his hardships, perhaps because of his hardships, he knew the presence of God in his life. He knew God, and God knew him, by name.

God sees what the world does not. The following is an example: +In March of 1622 a number of high profile saints were canonized. They included St. Ignatius of Loyola, St. Francis Xavier, St. Teresa of Avila, and St. Philip Neri. There was a fifth, St. Isidore. He founded no order, he accomplished no great deeds (apart from tilling the land).

He was, in fact, a simple farmworker, born in Madrid, who spent his entire working life in the service of a wealthy landowner. The one child he hoped for died in childhood. He knew of hardships, the toil, and sorrows of all farmworkers. He displayed a simple faith though profound.

He attended Mass daily and prayed continuously as he worked the fields. In Isidore’s case, however, his faith was attended by visible signs and wonders. It was reported, for example, that angels were seen assisting him as he plowed.

Isidore was famous for his generosity toward those even poorer than himself. His table was always open to the destitute, while he lived on the scraps left over. His kindness extended to animals. One winter day he was so moved by the sorrowful noise of some hungry birds that he opened the sack of corn he was carrying and poured out half its contents.

Though witnesses scoffed at his wastefulness, later, at the mill, the bag was found miraculously to be full. In the list of canonized saints, his type is remarkably rare; in heaven, presumably, less so.

Like Isadore, Lazarus is not just a poor man, but a poor man who believes and trusts in God, as his name accentuates. “Even though I suffer torment, I know God is my help!” He is an

example for all of us when things begin to go wrong. I lose my job, but I am confident to say, “God is my help!” I am poor or lonely, but I pray “God is my help!” Even though I may fail an exam, I call out, “God is my help!”

This parable tells us that If you feel like a Lazarus right now, battered by sickness, poverty and pain, forgotten by society and by those whom God has blessed in this life, continue believing and trusting in God, because God sees what the world does not. Rest assured if you have faith, God knows you by name.

If you see yourself as one of those blessed by God with the good things of life, open your door and see who is at your gate. See what God sees.

The rich man failed to have a relationship with the Lord because he failed to see God in his blessings and in the needs of Lazarus. Lazarus did not allow his sufferings to estrange him from the God, but accepted them in a manner that drew him closer to God. He knew the Lord and the Lord knew him, by name and welcomed him into eternal life, “Where everyone knows your name.”