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This World's Goods and Our Goals

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This World's Goods and Our Goals

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Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Sunday Readings for September 29, 2013 for Cycle C:

Am 6:1, 4-7; Ps 146; 1 Tim 6:11-16; Lk 16:19-31

THIS WORLD'S GOODS AND OUR GOALS

Lawrence E. Frizzell

Week by week we are shocked by the atrocious ways that human beings behave toward one another. War may bring out the worst in people, but greed and anger also lead to violence in homes and on the streets. The Church and each of us are called to bring the light and love of Christ to these situations, difficult as that task may be. This ongoing challenge is accompanied by a second: the realization that we should strive to prevent these very tragedies from happening. No one should be oblivious to the conditions that may lead to despair or eruptions of violence. The Second Vatican Council and all the Popes of recent decades have addressed both issues on numerous occasions.

God destined the earth and all it contains for all humanity and all peoples so that all created things would be shared fairly by all humankind under the guidance of justice tempered by charity...In their use of things people should regard the external goods that they legitimately own not merely as exclusive to themselves but common to others also, in the sense that they can benefit others as well (Vatican II, *The Church in the Modern World*, #69).

Last Sunday, the selection from the prophet Amos railed against those who trample upon the poor by unjust practices. This week the preoccupation of the rich with "the good life" is criticized. In their selfishness the rulers and nobility in the Northern Kingdom of Israel neglected their responsibility toward the community at large. They were so engrossed in fine foods and elegant living that "they are not made ill by the collapse of Joseph" (the Northern Kingdom). Failing to recognize impending political disaster in time to avert it, "they shall be the first to go into exile."

In our own day, the high officials in some corporations live in luxury and vote themselves a salary increase just as their company plunges into irreversible decline. No doubt they have plans for personal survival but what of the ordinary employees? The voice of the prophet should resonate through the boardrooms and executive offices of our day. But just as Amos was told to go home, the Church and people of insight do not expect to find many attentive listeners. The watchman or the whistle-blower fulfils an obligation in conscience by speaking the truth, no matter what the response (see Ez 33:1-9). Someday that person will be vindicated for proclaiming the truth that works justice.

The parable contrasting the rich man and Lazarus (a form of the name Eleazar, "God is my help") makes the point that even "benign" negligence of the poor can never be excused. Decades ago the Second Vatican Council drew upon the Church's tradition to drive home the same lesson.

Faced with a world today where so many people are suffering from want, the Council asks

individuals and governments to remember the saying of the Fathers: 'Feed the man dying of hunger, because if you do not feed him you are killing him,' and it urges them according to their ability to share and dispose of their goods to help others, above all by giving them aid which will enable them to help and develop themselves (#69).

Jesus stressed that the perennial message of the Scriptures should be the basis for people in each generation to examine their conscience and live so that they would achieve the true goal of life. The very name of the beggar epitomized his dependence on God for happiness, whereas the anonymous sybarite allowed possessions and pleasure to dull his conscience.

We still have Moses and the prophets, the teachings and example of Jesus and his followers to challenge us concerning our pursuit of personal happiness and the rights of others to live in dignity. Repentance is needed in every age so that wealth will be used to prepare the rich for entry into everlasting dwellings (Lk 16:9). The problem for many is that their wealth numbs them to the needs of their neighbor, and to their own mortality. As one wealthy man said: "Since I'm having such a great time here, I don't plan to go anywhere!" Would such a person be moved by the mystery of Christ's resurrection? Or would the poverty of Jesus evoke a response of compassion? May we listen to Moses and the prophets so that the passion and resurrection of Jesus will transform our lives!