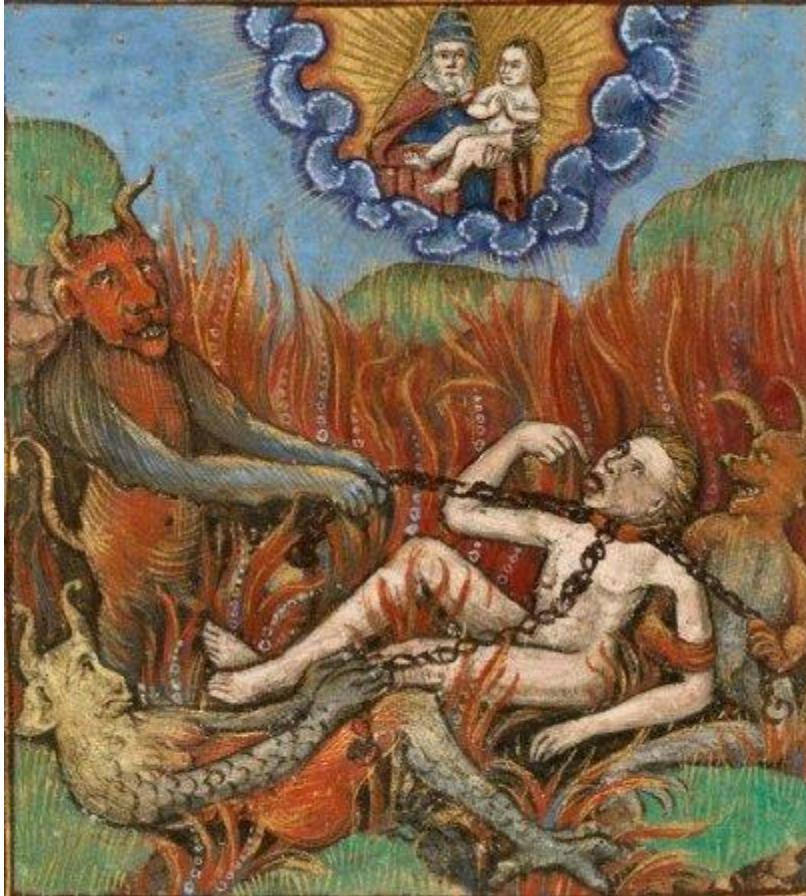


SUNDAY 25 SEPTEMBER 2022: THE  
TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY IN  
ORDINARY TIME.



***[The rich man] said, "Oh no, father Abraham, but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' Then Abraham said, 'If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone should rise from the dead.'" Luke 16:30-31.***

That picture up there is perhaps the most graphic this website has ever seen! It certainly reflects the equally graphic gospel story today. Note that Dives (Dī-ves or Dī-vees) is the traditional name for the rich man, though it is not in the gospel. Also, this Lazarus is not Jesus' friend of the same name who was raised from the dead; he's simply the impoverished character in this story. We have a crystal-clear parable here, not needing expert interpretation or showing any

confusing ambivalence. We have a rich man who doesn't give a fig (literally) to or for the wretched beggar at his gates, and lives the high life without a second thought. It is as if poor Lazarus did not even exist. But he did. And he was so crippled by bad health that he could not take care of himself, but in the eyes of God he was a good man in the way he lived his impoverished life. Dives, on the other hand, ignored the obvious need of the crippled man at the gates of his home (and presumably needy people anywhere else), failed utterly to follow God's law, to love your neighbor in this life, and so brought punishment upon himself. This parable is like a rallying cry encapsulating Jesus' entire message – *love God and love your neighbor!* However, the modern reaction to the picture above, which seems to reflect the parable accurately, “suffering torment in these flames” is much more likely to provoke laughter than fear. Devils with chains and fire licking at your feet are simply unbelievable. So is an update required?

The rich man clearly thought and acted solely for his own good and never anyone else's. He could not give a damn for Lazarus. His whole world was focussed completely and utterly on himself. The poor and suffering were irrelevant to his world. So, on being called to account for such behavior on his death, what could happen that would make sense today? At death, our bodies are gone, cremated or decomposed forever, our five senses but a memory. No more feasting and drinking is possible as we understand it. But we will still exist in a spiritual form, fully conscious of ourselves and our history. So, again, this is how it may be for the totally selfish: full consciousness, full self-awareness *for all eternity*, with no chance of ever -ever- changing; there will be no future. Selfishness condemns us to ourselves, without light, without company, forever. Fully conscious, no hope of change, with no-one else around, nothing to hear or see, nothing to do, yet fully and forever aware of oneself only. That is perhaps a more modern picture of hell I present to you today. Think of someone who is in that state today. Think of that person in a month's time, and s/he

is in exactly the same immovably conscious state. Think of that person one year from now: no change, yet still fully alone and self-aware. And it is like that forevermore, an eternal present. Does that seem more horrifying than chains and flames? Doesn't a selfish life call for a selfish eternity?



*Urban Poverty, [K. M. Nurul Huda 2016, The Independent, Dhaka, Bangladesh.](#)*

But there is no condemnation of a wealthy life in this parable. Hard work based on one's God-given talents, which education moulds into skills, and the rewards which flow from them, are good in the eyes of God. Hence success enables us to be more generous and help those who need it. We are all God's creatures, and as such are God's children. Hence we are all brothers and sisters and must behave as such. Ignoring that reality means we might well share in the fate of Dives. But at this moment we live in this present life. That gives us the perfect opportunity to behave as God wishes us to behave. Not one of us is alone; in God's family, we are related to all other people throughout the world. And heaven knows there are millions of people out there suffering enormous hardship which no-one should have to endure. And so those who can, perhaps even the poorest, should do as much as they are able to lessen the desperate suffering of those who have nothing. I would not wish Dives' fate on anyone (especially in the

possible hell just described). But the thing is, *it is easy to avoid such a fate in the here and now*. Perhaps we should look on those who have nothing as our passport to Heaven, judged by our genuine efforts to do our best to help them in any and every way we can. That is loving our neighbor as God wishes.