

Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle C

Amos 6: 1A, 4-7

Psalm 146: 7, 8-9, 9-10

1 Timothy 6: 11-16

Luke 16: 19-31

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A man stands gazing into the window of a jewelry store in a crowded shopping mall. He's occasionally jostled by the crowd of shoppers passing by. Suddenly, he smashes the window of the store, reaches into the display of jewelry, and comes away with a handful of gold chains. Now he tries to escape, but dozens of people have seen what he's done, and the crush of the crowd makes it impossible for him to move freely. Inevitably, before he's halfway to the food court, he's tackled by security guards and handed over to the police. In the squad car, on the way to the station, a police officer asks him, "What in the world were you thinking of? How did you expect to get away with all those people around?" The bewildered thief answers, "I didn't see the people. All I saw was gold."

This story reminds me of the expression, "Keep your eye on the prize." Apparently it's a paraphrase of a line from John Bunyan's, *The Pilgrim's Progress*. The idea the expression is meant to convey is that if we are going to accomplish anything in life, we have to ignore distractions, and focus on what is really important to us. We have to keep our goal before us, and work toward it always.

Of course, if we are to take this expression to heart, we have to be careful what prize we choose. If we select the wrong goal, like the thief in the story, we can fail to notice the people around us. And if we become

oblivious to other people, especially to people who need our help, the cost to them, and ultimately to us, will be great indeed.

That is the lot of the clever, cultivated, complacent, people described by the prophet Amos in our first reading. They stretched out comfortably on their couches, drinking good wine, reciting poetry, and improvising their own accompaniment on the harp, careless of the calamities that engulfed their neighbors. As a result, they were the first to go into exile.

A similar fate befalls the rich man in our Gospel. He isn't an entirely unattractive character. Even in the midst of his personal torment he spares a thought for his five brothers. But he's had his chance. He chose his prize, and he went out and captured it. His ambition was to enjoy the best of everything -- to squeeze every drop of pleasure out of life. He did just that. But, unfortunately, in his pre-occupation with this goal, he didn't notice poor Lazarus. He didn't mock Lazarus. He didn't abuse him. He just didn't notice he was there. He didn't give him a thought.

Our reading from 1 Timothy suggests a better goal for us: "seek after integrity, piety, faith, love, steadfastness, and a gentle spirit. Fight the good fight of faith." The first objection that occurs to us once we have resolved to see our neighbors' need and address it, is that the problems are so vast that we can't possibly solve them.

Part of the answer to this objection is implicit in the words: "Fight the good fight." If you don't think you can cure the ills of the world, at least try, and fail. Mother Teresa never came close to eliminating all the suffering in India. God hasn't held it against her.

Here at the Garaventa Center, we have a reasonably comfortable couch. We've been known to have an occasional glass of wine, and from

time to time we might even recite poetry, but we are resolved, nevertheless, to “keep our eyes on the prize” and to “fight the good fight of faith,” continuing to bring the intellectual and spiritual resources of Catholicism to bear upon the things that are wrong with the world. We’re delighted that you’ve joined us!