

SUNDAY BETWEEN 28 AUGUST & 3 SEPTEMBER, Year C

Responsibility: Canon Barlow

"All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." (Luke 14:11)

It sounds like a quick-fix formula for sainthood, doesn't it? The more you practice humility and make yourself more and more humble, the more saintly you become! And through the ages men and women have practiced humility as a religious way of life : dressing soberly; eating and drinking sparingly; subjecting their bodies to often rigorous discipline. Of course those religious Orders which imposed such disciplines did it in order to train people to focus on God rather than on earthly interests and desires. As did ascetics and hermits. But the trap is that some might practice an artificial humility to bring the focus upon themselves and their alleged religiosity.

The Pharisees were very careful to fulfill the commandments of the Law and to practice the ritual regulations that governed worship, food preparation, diet, dress, and interaction with non-Jewish people. Such matters as ritual cleanliness and ceremonial status were of paramount importance to the Pharisaic Jew of the first century A.D. They had still to learn that salvation is not earned by keeping a set of rules, but is by the grace of God via the Holy Spirit to whose promptings we respond.

A small booklet entitled "Helps to Bible Study" was pushed under the door of a number of churches a while back. There was no indication of the donor, but it is an American publication! It consists of 28 chapters of Biblical topics, quoting chapter and verse to prove some point of view. The texts are taken completely out of context, with Old and New Testament quotations mixed up in no particular order. Much of it is Pharisaic in content, in that directions for the so-called Christian life-style are expressed with chapter and verse to back it up. For instance, and I quote: "When a tree dies, the leaves drop off, never to return: so when we really die with Christ to sin, and self is crucified with Jesus on the cross, then all worldly adornments such as rings, earrings, beads, rouge, and lipstick will drop from us, never to return." And: "There is plain instruction in the Bible against the use of alcoholic liquors. This means that when we drink as will please God, we will not drink beer, wine, whisky, gin or any alcoholic liquor. When we really eat and drink as is pleasing to God, as Scripture commands us, we will lay aside tea, coffee, cola drinks and tobacco or any narcotic habit." These are just two examples out of the book, showing that Pharisaism is alive and well in some places. The implication is that by obeying all these rules we will become holy. It is the same outlook as the Pharisees held.

To go back to the Pharisees. There was nothing inherently wrong with their religious practices. But they used their scrupulous standards as a basis for excluding others from their fellowship, and to seek the respect and regard of others, and they fully expected that God would reward them for what they believed to be perfect behaviour and practice in the sight of God. Any who did not conform to the Pharisees' expectations came to be considered "outcasts" and "sinners". The zealous Jewish laymen whose movement had begun some 150 years before Christ to reform and purify Judaism had succumbed, by the time of Jesus, to the evil influence of pride and

exclusiveness . This pride was evident on many public occasions - they apparently believed that because of their exemplary religious practice they should be given seats of special honour - higher than those given to ordinary people.

Jesus however blasted the pretensions of the Pharisees when He said: "When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honour For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." Jesus was not dispensing good social advice in this parable. His words have little to do with proper dinner-party etiquette. The interaction of host and guest in the parable deals with an aspect of man's relationship with God. As in social etiquette, so in the spiritual realm, recognition is denied to those who demand it, and is given to those who think more highly of others than of themselves.

It is a common human characteristic to cultivate the society only of one's own kind, but the Pharisees had elevated this tendency into a spiritual principle, refusing all social contact with those who did not share their standards of piety. Whatever earthly satisfaction they may have derived from their mutual admiration society, they missed the heavenly blessedness that comes to those who show hospitality and kindness when there is no possibility of recompense. The loving service of the helpless and the needy, which Jesus Himself exemplified, is the very life of the Kingdom of God, and those who learn on earth to enjoy such a life will enjoy the perfection of it in heaven.

Yet the humility with which Jesus Christ asks us to approach our God is not simply accomplished through grudging toleration of the outcast, or by a determined effort to be a do-gooder. The fact is that our final acceptance at the heavenly banquet depends on our acceptance of others now. Jesus brought that point home when He said to His Pharisee host: "But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you." In other words, if we forgive and accept other persons, then God will forgive and accept us. This is humility in the Christian sense. It is not purely a passive virtue, but it is highly active and positive, and needs to find expression in the life-style of every Christian.

Christian humility then is not a creeping around with eyes cast down, and consciously sitting in the most uncomfortable chair, and deliberately seeking to do the most unpopular chores, and maintaining a sober and gloomy expression. It is the recognition that our salvation depends upon a God who sees us all - each one of us - as His children. We are to put away all that false pride and one-upmanship which separates us from Him and from each other.

As this morning's Epistle reading said: "Let mutual love continue..... Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God."

AMEN

SUNDAY BETWEEN 4th & 10th SEPTEMBER, Year C

Responsibility: Canon Barlow

"None of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions." (Luke 14:33)

Another of our Lord's uncomfortable pronouncements!

Surely it can't mean that we have to sell up our homes, dispose of all our goods and chattels, leave our families and friends, and go off to live in some kind of poverty-stricken existence somewhere, somehow! Probably not, for us. Although for some this has been the requirement for their faith journey. In earlier days it led to the establishment of closed monasteries and convents, where the life of discipline and prayer had real meaning.

That is not a popular thing to do today. Indeed even with the great liberalisation of the Orders of monks and nuns there are not many men and women offering in those vocations. So what can it mean for us?

Surely it means for those who profess the Christian faith that we must take it so seriously that we sit lightly to our material possessions, valuing them for what they are. Our personal relationships, important though they are, ought never come between us and our relationship with God. After all, personal relationships, no matter how dear and close, will someday come to an end, in terms of this world, but our relationship with God is eternal.

Today's Gospel passage warns us firstly to count the cost of discipleship, and secondly, to calculate the risk such discipleship may involve.

To become a Christian is a very serious undertaking, and not something to be taken lightly. We don't always recognise this. We get caught up in a system. Sent to Sunday School as a small child; automatically taken into the pre-Confirmation classes, where the requirements of being a Christian are spelt out. But that can be rather theoretical because confirmees tend to be youngsters who have not yet come to grips with the tests and temptations and demands of the world. We marry in a church, and if our partner happens to be on the same spiritual wavelength, we continue on as part of a congregation. Of course if our partner happens not to want to be involved in Church life, then a choice has to be made about directions and activities, and this sadly is often a point of marital friction. It may be here, for the first time, a Christian has to count the cost, and even run a risk with their relationship with their partner.

We are warned against unconsidered enthusiasms which may fizzle out when the difficulties involved become apparent. To begin and not to finish can often be more disastrous than never beginning at all. The man who plans a building, and because of a cash-flow problem runs out of materials, has in the end, neither a building nor a stock of material. The king, going to war without an adequate army, or underestimating the strength of the opposition, neither wins the battle nor keeps what army he has intact. Many people have been caught by recessions in this way - building up debts in the good times and unable to cope with them when interest rates go up and sales go down. Governments fall for this too!

The cost of discipleship may be high. It might include being regarded as undutiful sons or daughters, inconsiderate husbands or wives. The disciple might be treated as a dangerous political

agitator. It is not only in non-Christian countries that Christian people may be persecuted, but outspoken Christians in our own country have been in trouble with Governments from time to time. Despite earlier errors of judgement, Archbishop Peter Hollingworth, when he was Governor-General, upset Government leaders from time to time by outspoken criticism. And when Archbishop Ian George was Assistant Bishop of Brisbane he had a very rough time with the then Premier, Mr. Bjelke-Peterson, because of his outspokenness about abuses by that Government. Subsequent events proved Archbishop Ian to have been dead right.

We must not calculate whether we have enough enthusiasm to begin to be a Christian, but whether we have enough endurance to see it through, whatever the cost. The great Christian writer, William Barclay, wrote: ***"It is possible to be a follower of Jesus without being a disciple; to be a camp-follower without being a soldier; to be a hanger-on in some great work without pulling one's weight". Someone talking to a great teacher about another man said: "So and so was one of our students wasn't he?" The teacher replied devastatingly: "He may have attended my lectures, but he was not one of my students." There is a world of difference between attending lectures and being a student. It is one of the supreme handicaps of the Church that in the Church there are so many distant followers of Jesus, and so few real disciples."*** End of quote.

There are many forces at work today which can readily test our commitment. It is essential to remain strong and endure the cost of discipleship. Temptations arise which urge us to return to the little gods of our past, like the desire for popularity; the attraction of wealth; the false values of a materialistic society. It is easy and comfortable to settle for a superficial commitment, which makes only nominal demands - a life-style which is in fact very similar to that of the pagans who surround us.

We are challenged today to consider the nature and depth of our commitment to Christ. Jesus is very clear in his demands. We cannot afford to slacken off. Jesus does not say that those who tire of their calling can sit down for a rest, or just forget about what it means to be a Christian. He does not say to those who don't feel up to the task that they can side-step their obligations. Once a person meets Christ there are no other alternatives - there is no other road to salvation.

Jesus made it quite clear that there are no disciples without discipline and no saints without sacrifice. He constantly points out that there is no doubt that faithfulness to God is demanding and that Christian discipleship is both risky and costly. He calls all who would be disciples to count the cost and calculate the risk, and carry the cross.

There is the risk of involvement. No Christian can become a disciple without the risk of involvement with other people. If you don't want to get involved with people and causes, then best not get involved with Jesus. There is the risk of loving concern. Love itself is a risk. Love always runs the risk of being hurt, and rejected. Jesus experienced this risk. He came as God's Son to bring God's love. He was despised, rejected, and killed. This comes home to us in the turbulence of our world. To take a stand on Christian principles in any aspect of human life and thought is to run the risk of being misunderstood, of having our motives questioned, our character blackened.

Jesus spoke about the tower to be built, and the king preparing to go to war, so as to tell us that we must be fully conscious of what is involved in being a Christian. Discipleship requires the kind

of fidelity which gives ultimate priority to the kingdom of God,. ultimate loyalty to God, and a willingness to serve God where we are at the moment. It requires that we have a great ideal in life, one that has to be put before anything else we value. It is an ideal on which everything else is centred, and for which we live our lives.

If we are daunted by all this, and by the high standard demanded, let us remember that we are not left to go it alone. Christ, who calls us to follow him, walks with us every step of the way, sends us strength through the Holy Spirit, and will be there to meet us at the end.

Amen

SUNDAY BETWEEN 11th & 17th SEPTEMBER, Year C

Responsibility: Canon Barlow

[Based on the Gospel for the day viz. Luke 15:1-10]

"Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." (Luke15:10)

Undoubtedly our Lord's point in telling the parables of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin was 'the importance of the individual to God. In our modern society there is more and more concern being shown by Governments towards the sick and the needy and the improvident than ever before And this is a very good thing - you only have to read novels or watch films set about 100 years ago to appreciate a great difference. Unfortunately the sheer size of the task and the complex mechanism required to make it work - even with computers - makes a good principle open to abuse. Not only open to cheating by some who could work to earn their living but prefer to live on government handouts, but also actually although inadvertently, encouraging improvidence and thereby increasing the demand for pensions. Why work, if the government provides a reasonable living? Why save, if the government will look after us in our old age? And the more people who decide to take the improvident way, the more will be demanded from those whose self-respect makes them work and save and pay their way. For government money comes of course from the people before it can be disbursed. There must be a midway - one which will help the genuine needy, but which will encourage and respect the necessity for each person to pull his or her weight in the community. The very system which is intended to help the individual tends to depersonalise the individual as it seeks to keep track of each one and eliminate the possibility of cheating. Not only government, but private enterprise too identifies the individual by numbers for the convenience of computerisation, and more and more we find ourselves allocated some eight or ten or even 16 digit numbers for shop accounts and Bankcards and cheque-books. It seems at times that we are in danger of losing our personalities and becoming just a cipher.

Gossip can be annoying and destructive. But when it arises from kindly interest and concern, it can be beneficial - the sharing of news about a person in time of need and trouble can bring help and support. It is all too easy for people in larger communities to feel that no-one cares; that no-one even knows whether they exist or not. Loneliness in the community is a very real thing. Concern about individuals is extremely important, and we who know God's love and concern for each of His children should be, must be, loving and concerned also.

Today's Gospel passage is right on this point of the value of the individual. Jesus mixed with all kinds of people, and even the outcasts of society drew near to hear His teaching, because they knew He cared about them. The self-righteous Scribes and Pharisees criticized Him for spending time with such unacceptable people - unacceptable to them, that is. It doesn't say anywhere in the Bible that Jesus actually preferred the company of prostitutes, thieves, and that whole group generally referred to as sinners. But He gave them equal opportunity to hear His message, and to repent. By no means did all of the outcasts stop to listen, let alone repent. Some did. Some of the Scribes and Pharisees did too - men like Joseph of Arimathea, and Nicodemus, for instance.

On this occasion, Jesus answered His critics by telling them three parables, two of which we heard in today's passage -the third is the parable of the Lost or Prodigal Son. The message of the parables is clear: the individual is important to God. We are important to God.

The shepherd in the story could not afford to lose even one of his sheep. He only had 100 and eked out a precarious living from them. Perhaps a grazier with several thousand sheep might not worry too much about the loss of the odd one here and there - unless of course it happened to be a stud ram worth half a million dollars! But one out of 100 is a high proportion to lose. No wonder when he found it he called his friends and neighbours together to rejoice with him.

The other story comes to have meaning as we learn the value of the lost coin. It might have been part of the family's meagre resources - no banks in those days, and its loss a serious financial blow. Or it might have been part of the woman's headdress. Every Jewish girl scraped and saved until she had ten silver pieces, which were strung together and worn as part of her headdress as a married woman. The lost coin in this case would have great sentimental as well as financial value - something of the significance of a wedding ring, in addition to providing economic security So she lit a lamp and swept the floor, hoping to see the gleam of the coin or to hear it tinkle. Again, her joy when she finds her treasure is like the shepherd's, and causes her to rush out to rejoice with her friends and neighbours. And Jesus said: "Just so, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." There is the significance: the joy when the individual is found.

We should notice a factor common to both parables: the lost sheep was one which already belonged to the fold; the lost coin had already been in the woman's possession. They both belonged, they were both owned. Here is our Lord's answer to His critics - God owns all the riff-raff of society, as well as the respectable and the righteous. Jesus saw them all as God's people, and each had to be brought back into the kingdom, the family, of God.

We all err; we all go astray; we all get lost from time to time; we all need finding and bringing back to God at times. It is good to know that He is always seeking to draw us back to Him, however far off we might stray. It is good to know of His joy when we do eventually respond and let ourselves be found and returned to where we belong. And because as Christ's people we ought always to be concerned to try to do His work, we must also be aware of the lost, the lonely, and the outcast. As in our Lord's experience, some will respond and some will not. But some just need our interest and our concern, and reassurance of welcome to help them return to the fold.

Someone once saw a bishop wearing his purple shirt and asked him if he was anyone important. "Yes", he said, "I am somebody important, for I am made in the image of God; I am redeemed by the blood of His Son, Jesus Christ; I am the temple of the Holy Spirit." What a marvellous reply.

In these days of mass production, and of disposable throwaway products, when it is cheaper to chuck something out rather than to have it mended, there is a tendency to treat people the same way. In our society the individual tends to be less important than the success of some project, or the meeting of budgetary requirements. It is individuals who suffer inconvenience and discomfort in times of strikes, and pain and even threat to life, when hospital financing is cut. Government, organisations, unions - all tend to think in terms of grand designs. We, the Church, must keep the

needs of the individual person - for whom Christ died - firmly before us. We must also keep a high vision of ourselves as God's children: "for in my baptism I was made a member of Christ, the child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of God." And if we drift away from Him, He seeks and searches for us, and there is joy in heaven when we do repent and return.

Amen

SUNDAY BETWEEN 18th & 24th SEPTEMBER, Year C

Responsibility: Canon Barlow

[Based on the Gospel for today viz: Luke 16:1-13]

"No slave can serve two masters, for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth." (Luke 16:13)

The Gospel reading for today is one where the use of a modern translation pays off. The Parable of the Dishonest Manager or Steward, is not all that easy to crack to get at our Lord's teaching, and is much more difficult in the older language of the Book of Common Prayer. Because of the change in the meaning of words, the older version might give the impression that Jesus was approving the steward's dishonesty: the dishonest man was commended because "he had done wisely". Whereas modern translations say he "acted shrewdly", which in today's language makes a difference.

It has been said, and probably we might all agree, that if a person showed as little zeal and enthusiasm in his business affairs as most do in Church matters, he would soon be bankrupt. It is quite true that with many people, the great majority in fact, the Church and spiritual things take a low priority. You will find parents of school children very concerned about what their children are being taught in history, science, social studies, mathematics, but not at all interested in their religious education, either at school or at church. Twenty or thirty years ago, Sunday Schools abounded and generally were quite large, but the parents of the children, generally speaking, rarely worshipped. The situation today, while lamentable, is more honest: Sunday Schools where they exist are small and cater mostly for children of Church people. People will make the most elaborate plans to get away for a weekend, but planning attendance at church on a normal weekend is just not considered. They will attend all sorts of social functions and amusements but declare they never have time to help in the life of the Church.

This refers of course to the great "out there", not to the faithful nucleus who bring their children and worship regularly and do all in their power to advance and build up the fellowship of the Family of God. Actions speak louder than words and the actions of so many people speak of indifference and carelessness in the things of God.

The Parable of the Dishonest Manager is intended to show to what lengths a clever but unscrupulous man will go in order to ensure his safety and comfort. We are intended to realize in sharp contrast how very careless and offhand people can be in ensuring their eternal welfare. It is not a story to illustrate lack of morality - this manager can be placed in the company of many clever rascals who have been the central figures of stories like those in "The Arabian Nights" and other Oriental tales. The point here is the man's tactical cleverness and the inference is that we are to though not dishonestly, over the things that really matter

In our Lord's story, the rich man had discovered that his manager had been squandering his property. He demanded that the stock record and audited financial statements be produced, and made it clear that he is about to fire the man. The manager was faced with a crisis: manual work

would be out of the question, and he was too proud to go on the streets and beg. What he needed most at that time was friends. So he took steps to place his employer's debtors under obligation to himself. Dishonest though the fellow was, his unscrupulous resourcefulness and enterprise were admired by his master; and the parable ends with the keen observation: "For the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation, than the children of light. Church people do tend to be far more open and trusting and innocent in their dealings with others. That is not necessarily a bad thing, but it does mean that we will be cheated from time to time.

One lesson we might make out of all this is: if a dishonest man can use another's money to make friends so that there will still be people to look after him when he is out of a job, how much more should honest people use their own money to make friends with God, so that He will welcome them into His eternal home! This is not a way into heaven, but of right stewardship of this world's goods. All the opportunities of this world are tests of character and by their behaviour in small matters, men and women show whether or not they are fit for greater responsibility.

With worldly possessions and riches comes also the responsibility of right and proper use of such wealth in the extending of the kingdom of God and the easing of the burdens of those less fortunate. It was this responsibility that Jesus referred to on a number of occasions when He spoke of how difficult it is for a rich man to enter heaven. In our use of our worldly possessions, we are to be as astute in Christian stewardship as the dishonest manager was in looking after himself.

Another lesson we might consider involves our reaction to crisis. Jesus was speaking to His disciples, when He told them this parable. What was praiseworthy about this crook was that, faced by a crisis in his life, he acted promptly and decisively, even though wrongly, to save himself. His lifestyle was to be dramatically changed, and he acted smartly to meet the crisis. The disciples were in a similar position, although right then they did not know it. They were about to be faced by an imminent crisis, and their lives were going to be very different. Jesus was soon to go to His death on the cross and to His victory in the Resurrection. The disciples were going to be shocked, dismayed, and shattered. How would they face the crisis? Would they act wisely and decisively? Or panic? And later they would face persecution and violence. Could they face those terrible times with confidence and calmness with the same sort of cool decision with which that manager faced his time of testing?

What of ourselves? We find ourselves facing crises from day to day: sometimes they seem threatening and crushing; sometimes minor and merely niggling. But they all have to be faced and coped with, whether it be a matter of which bills to pay this month and which to leave, or the threat of war in various places around the world, or the worry of a child's illness, or who to vote for next time. How do we cope? Do we panic and go to pieces, or turn our minds away and think about something else, hoping it will all go away? Times of crisis expose the true direction of our lives - have we grasped what are the true values? Have we laid hold of those eternal truths which lead to real life? Are we alert and ready to deal properly and responsibly and Christianly with the things that concern our eternal welfare?

It is all a matter of allocating our priorities. "You cannot serve God and wealth."

Amen

SUNDAY BETWEEN 25th SEPT, & 1st OCT., Year C

Responsibility: Canon Barlow [Based on the Epistle & Gospel for today]

'But as for you, man of God, pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith.'" (1 Tim.6:11)

We have in the parable which comprises today's Gospel reading, a clear warning from Jesus to those who fail to extend love, concern, and consideration to those less fortunate than themselves. It is precisely this teaching of our Lord's which makes, indeed forces Christians to worry about the plight of refugees; people suffering from the excesses of power-hungry despots; primitive nations affected by drought or other natural disaster; aboriginal people caught between their way of life and ours. All these are rightly the concerns of Christian men and women. How often people say: "It's no concern of mine." They say it when approached to help some good cause which needs their help. They say it when they hear of some individual to whom they could lend a helping hand. They say it when they are asked to be involved in Church and community concerns. Too often when wrong things are being done or spoken; when governments are on the verge of giving in to strong humanist pressures; when it is the easy way out. They make no protest but say: "It's no concern of mine." Certainly there are times when we should say it to ourselves and not be interfering busybodies - but as a rule we say it too often and use it as an easy way to save trouble.

Another saying as often on people's lips is: "I didn't know!" The plea of ignorance is as common as the plea "It's no concern of mine." Yet if there is one good thing today's newspapers, radio, and T.V. does, it is to inform us of the desperate needs of people across the world and in our own country.

Both pleas were used by Dives in the parable set before us today. The story is of a selfish rich man and an unfortunate beggar, whose positions are reversed after death. The picture drawn of the fate in store for the good and the wicked in the next world is drawn from traditional Jewish belief - Jesus used it to enable His hearers to get the message. It was not intended to be a literal guide to what lies beyond physical death. Nor was it our Lord's intention to teach a strict doctrine of rewards and punishments - nothing is said about Dives being an evil man; nothing is said about Lazarus being a good man. And although some political creeds suggest that all rich people are selfish and bad, and all poor people are high-minded and good, that is just not true. Jesus nowhere taught that it is wrong to be rich or that the temptations which riches bring cannot be overcome. Poverty too brings its pressures and temptations

The point of the story is in the character of the rich man and in his implied excuses: "It's no concern of mine" and "I didn't know."

Jesus did not usually give names to people in His parables, and in this one He only named the poor man, Lazarus. The rich man is called Dives, not named by Jesus but by tradition, from the Latin word for a rich man. Like so many people today, Dives devoted himself to the selfish enjoyment of luxurious pleasures, under the belief that this life was the only one he had to live, and that it could not be better spent than in self-indulgence. He used his wealth irresponsibly, because he did not believe in a judgement in which he would have to account for his conduct. His wrong behaviour was the result of an erroneous creed, The fault was not merely that he used his money for selfish ends, but that he failed to use it generously, as a trust and a responsibility.

There, right at his front gate, lay a person he could have helped. But he felt that Lazarus was no concern of his, for were there not beggars everywhere – what was one more or less? Besides it was probably God's will that he was rich and Lazarus was poor. Few Christians would put that into words, but collectors for charity know that it is certainly expressed in reluctance to contribute to the needy. Even the wife of a Bishop could write, a little more than a hundred years ago,

The rich man in his castle, the poor man at his gate;

God made them high and lowly and ordered their estate

This is a verse that we no longer sing from Mrs. C.F. Alexander's 'All things bright and beautiful.' It is included in the Ancient and Modern Hymnbook, but has been omitted in versions ever since.

When we look back to the past and see some of the social wrongs and injustices, we are astonished and appalled that Christians could tolerate them and participate in them: the slave trade, harsh penalties for minor crimes; employment of little children in dreadful conditions, and so on. Such blindness to injury and abuse and wrong seems to us incredible. Thank God though Christian men and women did see the shame of it and persevered until such evils were done away with, although there are still grievous injustices and abuses in non-Christian countries today. It is Christian people today who are in the forefront of the fight against immorality and moral pollution, though still too many are inclined to retreat into "It's no concern of mine." It IS our concern!

The scene in the parable changes: the world looks at things one way, God sees them in quite another. Lazarus is now at the banquet table, in bliss and ecstasy, close to God, at the place of honour next to Abraham. Dives is outside in torment. Even this does not humble his arrogance. Having ignored Lazarus during his lifetime, he still treats him as a servant, an inferior. "Father Abraham, send Lazarus to cool my tongue." He tries to make excuses for himself: if only someone had warned him in advance he would have taken the necessary steps to avoid coming to that place of torment. "I didn't know!"

Dives asks Abraham to send Lazarus to his five brothers to give them the benefit of his first-hand knowledge of conditions after death, so that they may have the advantage he himself had missed. The answer is that no such warning is necessary: in the Scriptures and in the teachings of the Church lie sufficient warnings and instructions to guide their earthly conduct in the issues of life and death. "They have Moses and the Prophets, let them listen to them." If they will not heed them, they will not listen even if someone should return from the dead. Jesus declared that there is no way of demonstrating spiritual truth to those whose minds are not open to conviction.

We have even less excuse than Dives had. Not only do we have Moses and the Prophets, with their limited vision and understanding, but we have the explicit teaching of Jesus Christ Himself. And more still than that: we have the guidance and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit available to us, to lead us into righteousness of living, and truth. But this is only as we make ourselves open to His influence and power.

The great gulf fixed between Dives and Lazarus in the next world was illustrative of the finality of the ultimate judgement. There is no such gulf fixed between this life and the future life. Jesus did penalties for minor crimes; employment of little children in dreadful conditions, and so on. Such blindness to injury and abuse and wrong seems to us incredible. Thank God though Christian men and women did see the shame of it and persevered until such evils were done away with, although there are still grievous

injustices and abuses in non-Christian countries today. It is Christian people today who are in the forefront of the fight against immorality and moral pollution, though still too many are inclined to retreat into "It's no concern of mine." It IS our concern!

The scene in the parable changes: the world looks at things one way, God sees them in quite another. Lazarus is now at the banquet table, in bliss and ecstasy, close to God, at the place of honour next to Abraham. Dives is outside in torment. Even this does not humble his arrogance. Having ignored Lazarus during his lifetime, he still treats him as a servant, an inferior. "Father Abraham, send Lazarus to cool my tongue." He tries to make excuses for himself: if only someone had warned him in advance he would have taken the necessary steps to avoid coming to that place of torment. "I didn't know!"

Dives asks Abraham to send Lazarus to his five brothers to give them the benefit of his first-hand knowledge of conditions after death, so that they may have the advantage he himself had missed. The answer is that no such warning is necessary: in the Scriptures and in the teachings of the Church lie sufficient warnings and instructions to guide their earthly conduct in the issues of life and death. "They have Moses and the Prophets, let them listen to them." If they will not heed them, they will not listen even if someone should return from the dead. Jesus declared that there is no way of demonstrating spiritual truth to those whose minds are not open to conviction.

We have even less excuse than Dives had. Not only do we have Moses and the Prophets, with their limited vision and understanding, but we have the explicit teaching of Jesus Christ Himself. And more still than that: we have the guidance and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit available to us, to lead us into righteousness of living, and truth. But this is only as we make ourselves open to His influence and power.

The great gulf fixed between Dives and Lazarus in the next world was illustrative of the finality of the ultimate judgement. There is no such gulf fixed between this life and the future life. Jesus did