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# MDP of God

Some time ago I came across the story of an American Pilot during WWII who was shot down behind enemy lines

He was captured by the Japanese and thrown into a makeshift prison

For quite some time he was the only prisoner- and he wasn’t mistreated in the prison – they didn’t beat him or torture him – *but they didn’t give him much food either*

So many nights he went to sleep feeling hungry

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One day his jailers through in another prisoner- but it was a Japanese soldier who they called a traitor- and he had been beaten badly

The American pilot cleaned up the man’s wounds- tried to minister to his needs- and even shared the little bit of food he had with the Japanese prisoner- because they would give him no food.

They both went to sleep pretty hungry

Often the Japanese prisoner was taken out and beaten and when he was returned to the cell – the American cleaned him up as best he could- and shared his food.- *and also shared his faith in Jesus with the man*

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This went on for some time – until one day the Japanese prisoner was beaten very severely – it was obvious that he was not going to survive for long

The American again cleaned up his wounds and shared his food with him

And the American said, “you’re not going to make it—when you leave this world would you like to go to Jesus?”

The Japanese prisoner looked up into his eyes and said, “If Jesus is anything like you- I can’t wait to meet Him”

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With that the American pilot took the little water he had, poured it over the man’s head and said, “I baptize you in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit”

My friends I share that story with you because that American pilot was quite a contrast to the rich man we heard of in today’s gospel [Luke 16:19-31]

The pilot shared what little he had with the Japanese prisoner- the rich man refused to share *from his great abundance* with Lazarus or others

The pilot was a wonderful example of faith for this Japanese prisoner—The rich man in the gospel was a terrible example of indifference to the needs of others

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The pilot sought to bring the love of God to a total stranger – *in fact to a man who very much could have been viewed as an enemy*—the rich man in his life on earth appeared to be unwilling to be bothered with others- especially the poor and needy

The fact is my friends, all of us are called to be a witness to Jesus in our world and today’s gospel reminds us that there are consequences if we fail to do that

*The fact of the matter is—Jesus calls us to surrender our lives to Him*

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Now there’s a lot of debate about **where** this rich man was at.

Some would argue he was in hell, for all eternity.

They conclude that because of Abraham’s words, “Between you and us is fixed a great abyss, so that those who might wish to cross from here to you cannot do so, nor can anyone cross from your side to us.”

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*There are others* who argue (I believe these arguments are persuasive)-- that the rich man was in **Purgatory.**

Purgatory is, of course the place where we believe that we will be purified from our sins after death-*before going to heaven*—**so there’s great hope**

Where the fire of God’s love will consume (or burn off) our indifference, our anger, lust, envy, bitterness, etc, etc.. - our sins

Where we’ll experience, as theologians have traditionally put it, “the temporal punishment due to sin.”

# There are two reasons people give for saying this is Purgatory

First, those who believe this is Purgatory argue that this was a true story and not a parable at all

They point out that Jesus gives one of the characters a name – Lazarus

# *And in no other parable does Jesus name any of the characters*

The story is not introduced with the words, “and Jesus told this parable”

*So they argue that this is what happened when Lazarus had died*- **before he was raised from the dead**

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And when He did raise him from the dead– *it didn’t* convince the scribes and Pharisees to believe in Jesus – *in fact they were plotting to kill Lazarus too* – because people were believing in Jesus because of him

So the line of Abraham in the story – “that if they don’t believe because Moses and the prophets – they won’t believe even if someone should rise from the dead – **that obviously was true-***they didn’t believe even when someone was raised from the dead*

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The second reason people argue that this is Purgatory-*is because of the rich man’s concern for his brothers.* He says to Abraham, “Father, send Lazarus to my father’s house where I have five brothers. *Let him be a warning to them* **so that they don’t end up in this place of torment.”**

Some theologians would argue that in hell we are incapable of love and concern for others.

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*That’s because we’re totally cut off from God’s grace*. Without God’s grace we have no ability to love.

So this man being **concerned** for his brothers, the argument goes, *would indicate that he couldn’t be in hell.*

*He’s obviously is not in heaven at this point* - so he must be experiencing the cleansing that will occur for those who are not faithful enough to enter immediately into heaven, but

Who **are not unfaithful** enough to be separated from God forever.

The man is obviously a member of the household of faith since he refers to Abraham as Father.

All who are born again in baptism see Abraham as a spiritual father to us.

So this man who is in the household of faith is **experiencing torment** at the end of this life.

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Whether the man is in hell or purgatory really matters little to the point I’d like to make [it obviously matters a lot to him]

But whether he’s in hell or purgatory, Jesus is making the point that *how we live this life* **matters**.

It matters how we live – it matters how we love- it matters how we live out our faith

All of us are called by God to live our lives with love- all of us are called to live with faith – and all of us are called to give witness to Jesus in our way of life

My friends, I believe that this gospel is both very consoling and very challenging

It’s consoling because it points out how the scales are balanced at the end of this life—**Justice will prevail in the end**

You know a lot of people today have the attitude- *as they turn their backs on God* – “It’s not fair!!! It’s not fair that man was so poor- It’s not fair that he suffered so much! It’s not fair that some people have so much while others have so little!”

And they use that **unfairness** as an excuse to reject or ignore God

After all they ask- “what kind of God would allow that?”

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But this gospel reminds us that our time here is so limited in comparison to eternity

After all- poor Lazarus lived maybe 40 or fifty years- but he’s been at Abrahams side for the last 2,000 years *and counting*

The scales will be balanced- **God knows what He’s doing**- In the end no one *who is faithfu*l is going to claim that God was unfair- *no one who is faithful* will regret their lives- *no one who is faithful* will say that it wasn’t worth it

On the other hand people tend to look at people who are uncaring or crooked or who abuse others and they have the attitude of ***“It’s not fair!”***

^^^ That they have so much and others have so little

^^^ That they’ve treated people so shabbily and they get away with it

^^^ That liars and cheats seem to have no consequences

And again- today’s gospel makes it clear that is not the case

So this gospel is very consoling—**Justice will be done**

On the other hand, it’s challenging- *are we loving others as God calls us to love*

Am I more like that pilot in that story I began with, or am I more like the rich man when it comes to loving others

Have I surrendered my life to Jesus—or am I living as the Lord of my own life?---

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And notice – while it’s important to love our families- that’s not enough—the rich man loved his brothers—but he still had torment because he didn’t love the poor- he didn’t care for the needy

I know in my own life – there’s a lot of people I love- but do I love the poor?

In all honesty I could probably do a lot better on that

Do I love the needy and help them as much as I can – again I could probably do a lot better

**So this reading is challenging**

My friends, Jesus is making it clear today that our lives matter- the way we love matters- the way we care for others matters- our generosity to others – matters

As we come together today – let’s ask God to give us the grace to love others as He calls us too

To love not only our families—*although that’s certainly essential* – but to love the poor – the needy – those who have less than we do

Let’s love in that way, so that when people see us they will feel—like that Japanese prisoner,--- “If Jesus is anything like you, I can’t wait to meet Him”