

26.6.75  
19.7.79

Yes Lord (Ave Maria 15)

Prayer of St Francis  
(Another Dawn)

A prayer of St Ephraem before the reading of scripture: @.@.

You probably remember the story Jesus told about a rich man and a poor man, and their respective destinies — and if you saw the film 'Godspell', you might remember too the song and acting out of Jesus' story: it was perhaps a bit too literally imagined there, not a story for today. Anyhow, let's today listen again to the story as Jesus told it to his audience, before thinking a bit about how we might understand His message in our situation now:

@@ St Luke's Gospel 16<sup>19ff</sup> [Good News' p183]

→ MUSIC ["Beatitudes", 'In Love' 14]

A song by the Redwood Mission Sisters, 'Beatitudes'. PRAYERS

What is perhaps disconcerting about Jesus' parable of the rich man and the poor man is that we're not told the rich man did anything wrong to earn his eternity in hell. We're left to suppose it was simply because he ignored the poor man at his gate. Every time he went out he would have to pass him annoyingly present at his front door, disfigured, piteously waiting for scraps from last night's dinner party — the rich man saw him, passed on. Jesus described conditions in the world he lived in, inculcating what we'd nowadays call 'social consciousness'. Like the Hebrew prophets before him, he was attacking the social scandal of rich and poor living side by side, with the rich doing nothing about the scandalous inequality but just carrying on with their own lives, ignoring the poor. The same situation of daily meeting of the rich and the poor continues in many places today. But there is one big difference between the society Jesus lived in and much of modern society:

rich and poor still exist in hell, but often today they never meet. They live in ~~different~~ separate places and the rich man never sees the poor man: he knows he exists, and can go and search for him if he cares to, but he doesn't have him sitting awkwardly at his gate — thanks, often, to "enlightened" legislation ... So today's rich man can pass his life without ever thinking of the poor man who's out of sight and so can be out of mind. Our modern transport makes this possible: people can live far from where they work, and after work return to live among their own financial kind: society structures keep rich and poor well away from each other. In a sense, this segregation diminishes the responsibility of the sins of the affluent; but the sin of society itself is greatly increased. The cutting edge of Christ's parable is the fact that the rich man passed by the poor man every day and ignored him. Surely Christ would be moved to even greater indignation at a society which would segregate the poor man out of all sight of the rich man, and create (as in so many cities) vast poor areas where the rich need never tread. Perhaps here we can all do something, to develop the imagination to remember the poor man who does not sit at our front door. Christians should be able to help people to "connect" in our complex society.