

**COMMENTARY ON READINGS FOR SEPT. 26, 2004
(Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time)**

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This Sunday's readings continue the theme of riches and poverty: specifically, condemnation of the stereotypically uncaring and oppressive rich and comfort to the helpless poor for whom the Lord is concerned. The reading from Amos is a scathing satire on the frivolities of the wealthy, oblivious to the disaster about to befall them. The psalm expresses God's watching out for the typical categories of the disadvantaged: foreign workers (resident aliens, or *gērîm*), widows and orphans. The reading from 1 Tim, following on the "love of money is the root of all evil" verse, exhorts young Timothy to shun those things and maintain himself in holiness.

There are many things to note in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, especially the contrasts. The rich man has no name (his name is *not* "Dives," "Rich"!), but Lazarus the beggar does, reversing the normal state of things in this world. The rich man dines sumptuously, unconcerned for Lazarus, who in turn feeds the dogs who lick his wounds. Lazarus at death is carried by angels to Abraham's bosom (see Luke 13:28-30); the rich man is simply buried. Their lots are reversed in the afterlife. The rich man is in torment, while Lazarus is consoled, and there can be no change now. The reason given is not particularly ethical (i.e., the rich man was bad and Lazarus was good), but a stark, Semitic, biblical, eschatological reversal, dear to Luke: the rich man had had his reward on earth while Lazarus had suffered; in the End Time, places are reversed, the last become first (see Luke 1:52-53; 6:20-26). Luke is not interested in drawing fine, apologetic distinctions regarding being wealthy while remaining unattached, etc.: the mere coexistence of opulence and misery condemns the rich man.

The conclusion of the parable warns against expecting an unusual manifestation of the divine will through something miraculous: an honest reading of the Scriptures should be enough for the rich man's brothers.