

HOMILY ~26TH SUNDAY Ordinary Time~ September 28, 2025

Something happened many years ago when I was newly ordained and I still think about it today.

One day I was finishing my day at the office. When I walked outside I saw a man that I did not know, about 60 years old sitting on a bench. I walked over to him and asked, "Is there something I can do to help you?" He said, "I don't know." The way he said it sounded to me like there was a lot going on there. I said, "I have to go down to the church for a few minutes. If you wait here for me we can talk when I get back." He did not respond to that. I went down to the church and came back in about 10 minutes. On the way back I was hoping he would be gone because I was supposed to have dinner with a friend. But when I got back he was still there. I talked to him for a long time and I will give you the Reader's Digest version. I found out that he was divorced several years ago. He had adult children but none of them lived in the area and he had little contact with them. He told me that he did not have any reason to go on living. He told me that he had stopped taking all of his medications a number of months ago, one of them was an anti-depressant. I asked him if there was someone I could call to come and get him and he said "no." I convinced him to go with me to the hospital emergency room. They admitted him, and I do not know what happened to him after that. I wonder what would have happened to that man had I not stopped and talked to him. I wonder why I stopped to talk to him. I wonder what would have happened to him if he did not wait for me to come back from the church. I wonder why I left him. I was just going down to the church to welcome a visiting priest who was there to do a wedding. He would have carried on without me. I knew that the man on the bench needed to talk to me. I think God had a hand in all of this.

We have another parable in the Gospel reading today. There was a rich man who had Lazarus lying at his door, hungry and covered with sores. Now there is nothing to indicate that the rich man did anything dishonest to accumulate his wealth. There is nothing to indicate that the rich man did anything to cause the situation that Lazarus found himself in. It appears that the rich man did not do

anything wrong, he just did nothing to help him. Maybe he did not notice Lazarus. Maybe he thought it was not his responsibility to help him. Or maybe he just did not care. When they both died, Lazarus ended up in heaven and the rich man did not.

In our culture today, we are becoming more and more socially isolated. Technology is replacing personal contact. So much of our communication is by text. When people tell me that they talked to someone I sometimes ask them “did you talk to them or text them?” It was usually a text. I think people are unlikely to ask for help in a text. If we talked to them on the phone or saw them, we would be way more likely to pick this up even if people do not ask for help. People are feeling more isolated and lonely. The number of people who report having no one to discuss important matters with has tripled since 1985. So many people are in need of counseling and therapy today and I think part of the reason why is because they have no one to talk to. I am a big believer in counseling, but much of counseling is listening and helping people to sort things out. Many times we can do that with friends or family. And I will talk to anyone who wants to talk to me. You can call the office and make an appointment. You do not need to say why you want to meet. And we are constantly distracted by our phones. Even when we are with people we are frequently paying more attention to our phones than the people we are with. Participation in traditional institutions like community organizations, civic groups, organized religion has been declining for decades. Even places where we used to gather like malls and parks are now pretty much empty much of the time so there is less opportunity for social connections. People today are more likely to move away from friends and family for school or work leading to more social isolation. That is why we have something social surrounding everything we do.

I think we need to make a conscious effort to be more attentive to the people around us. Make more of an effort to have in person contacts with family and friends. Try to talk on the phone rather than texting. We do not want to end up like the rich man in the parable, suffering for all eternity because we did not notice the people in need that surround us. God will give us the opportunities.