

“A Great Chasm has been Fixed”

Father Abraham declares: “between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.” That’s either good news or bad news – depending on which side of the chasm you are on.

To those in torment, who desire even a drop of water to ease their agony – these words only serve to heap coals upon their heads. There is no relief from their agony in the fire – no way out of that place of torment – no escape back to life the way it was, clothed in fine linen and feasting sumptuously. And worst of all? There is no way to Abraham’s bosom. A great chasm has been fixed.

For Lazarus – and all the saints who have been carried to the side of Abraham, “the father of all believers” – that unbridgeable chasm is great news. It means no crossing over from here to there – no return to the beggarly life oozing with illness – and no way to be thrown out of heaven and into hell.

The great chasm is both good news and bad – depending on where you are living. What is certain and sure is that the rich man lives in eternal torment and agony – and Lazarus lives eternally in the comforts of paradise in his Father’s house.

But Jesus speaks these words to those still living in this world – to the Pharisees, to His disciples, to you and me. What about you and your brothers? What will happen when you die?

One thing we learn from this parable (as we hear in another portion of Holy Scripture) is that “it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes the judgment” – a judgment that is certain and sure – a judgment that cannot be changed.

Another thing we learn is that reality is not always what it appears to be. It appears that the rich man was favored by God. He must be doing something right ... right? And Lazarus? Well, we walk by similar people and wonder what they’ve done to end up like that. But death has a way of bringing what is true to light.

In the end, both men die – as will all people – for all have sinned, and death is the wage that our sin has earned. Both men are sinners. One ends up in heaven, however, and the other one in torment.

Is this God's way of evening things out? His form of justice? You know, "In lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here and you are in anguish." IF you suffer in this life you'll earn heavenly rewards – and IF your life is full of good things, then expect the worst in the life to come?

NO. Not at all. Being rich or poor – belly full or dumpster diving – doesn't determine your eternal dwelling place. And while "the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil" – and many people are lulled into a complacent security because of wealth – such things are not inherently evil. It is not sinful to enjoy the gifts God has given – and, on the other hand – if you are poor and in want, that doesn't mean the Lord despises you.

SO, what determines your eternal dwelling place? Father Abraham gives the answer – it's hearing Moses and the Prophets – that's the key.

Hearing Moses and the Prophets is hearing God Himself. It is God calling secure sinners to repentance – to sorrow and contrition for holding to false gods for their livelihood. As we heard through the prophet Amos – those who do not grieve over their sins will be taken into exile – a place of torment – inhabited by the rich man, and all who will not hear and believe.

The message of Moses and the Prophets – of all the Holy Scriptures – is that there is One who has died and been raised to life again. God's own Son, Jesus Christ, came from heaven to earth in order to give His life as a ransom for all – to reconcile sinners destined for hell – to bridge the chasm which stands between heaven and hell.

On the third day, the evidence that the ransom for sin had been paid in full was manifested to all the world – as the crucified Lord stood upon the face of the earth and proclaimed peace to His disciples. The great chasm has been bridged for all sinners – and there is only one way out of our exile to hell – and that is by faith in the One who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

One HAS come back from the dead and He preaches to you today. He soothes the torment of your sin with the water of His baptism – quenching your thirst for forgiveness – extinguishing the guilt of your sin. His Body and Blood, given into death and shed upon the cross – is resurrected and given to you – so that you may be resurrected from your death to sin, to a life everlasting.

This resurrected One says: “I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes Him who sent me HAS eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.”

Jesus, the Christ, the Resurrected One, has fixed a great chasm between you and your sin. By the blood of the Lamb – your greed, idolatry, selfishness, and all sin – has been cast into the depths of the sea – separated from you as far as the east is from the west.

God the Father says of His Son, “Listen to Him.” And as you stand before the Father today, He declares that you are “not condemned” for Jesus’ sake. In Christ you have already passed through death to life – through the grave to paradise – from the agony of your sin to the comfort of His forgiveness. In Christ – you live in heaven – even as you live on this earth.

You live as a poor sinner, desiring to eat what falls from the Table – and the Lord spreads before you His sumptuous feast. He gives you food from heaven that satisfies all your needs and heals your wounds.

May it be your heaven on earth – until He comes back to take you to Abraham’s side – where you will live with Him, inseparable, for all eternity. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.