

- So many of my favorite memories as a child center around family meals. As was fairly customary at the time, our family ate together every night, and on Sundays we often had extended family with us.
- Even as a kid, I was content to sit for hours at a time around the dining room table of my grandparents, listening to family stories and the family discussions of politics, or whatever happened to be the topic of the day.
- Dinner is where I learned so much as a child: about my family, but also about life in general. It was at the dinner table that so many of my deeply-held beliefs were first formed, tested, and refined over the years as I imbibed and questioned the wisdom of my elders.
- There's a sacred quality to a family meal. Dinnertime is a natural time for families to draw closer to one another through the enjoyment of food and drink. The natural conversations that flow over a meal are a perfect time for parents to form their kids.
- I really hope that you understand this and make the most of your family meals.
- Considering this, it's no wonder that food and meals feature prominently in Gospel stories. It's no wonder that our Lord chose to impart some of His most important teachings at meals.
- In the Gospel of Luke, from which today's Gospel is taken, there are 19 different meals mentioned – 13 of which are particular only to Luke's Gospel. I guess St. Luke liked to eat!
- Today's Gospel story comes from a string of parables that our Lord tells while he's sitting at dinner at the home of one of the leading Pharisees on a Sabbath day.
- To give you a little context, during this particular meal at the Pharisee's home, a man with dropsy slips in, unnoticed, into the dining room looking to be healed by Jesus.
- When Jesus notices the Pharisees watching intently to see if He will heal the lame man on a Sabbath, He does so – and then he launches into a series of parables, including today's Gospel story, as a means of both encouraging conversion and rebuking the Pharisees for being, well, pharisaical!
- For the past several weeks, we've been following this string of parables in our Sunday Gospels. And today we hear the parable of Lazarus and the rich man, which speaks of how the rich man dined sumptuously, while poor Lazarus would have been happy to eat the scraps that fell from the rich man's table.
- This is an important parable for many reasons. First, it teaches us about the immortality of the soul, as well as the rewards and punishments we will face. In this, it shows us that our actions in this life have consequences in the next.
- This parable also teaches us about the inherent dignity of every human person, regardless of his financial or social standing, regardless of whether he is blessed or suffers adversity in this life.
- Of course, as we hear of the punishment of the rich man for failing to help Lazarus, we are also reminded that doing the corporal works of mercy is part and parcel of practicing our Christian faith.
- At the heart of this parable is an exhortation for us to cultivate the universal Christian virtue of charity! We are to give to others in need because God has given to us all that we have. We are to show mercy to others because God has shown mercy to us.

- However, the gravest sin of the rich man isn't that he's stingy with his money. His gravest sin is that he looks down upon Lazarus with disdain. He considers Lazarus a nuisance. The rich man's attitude is an affront to Lazarus' inherent human dignity.
- Even in the afterlife, the rich man believes Lazarus should serve him, and so he pleads with Father Abraham to employ Lazarus in either cooling his tongue or warning his brothers.
- In the spiritual torpor and complacency that's resulted from his living of a rich and sumptuous life, the rich man thinks he's better than Lazarus – and that's his real downfall.
- That's the danger of having so many of this world's good things so easily at our disposal: we get spoiled! If we aren't careful, we can begin to believe that we deserve only the best that life has to offer, and we can lose our capacity to suffer well.
- Even worse, we can begin to believe that we're entitled to the good things of this world, and begin to look down on those who don't have what we have. This is what happens to the rich man in the parable.
- In telling this parable to the Pharisees, Jesus is telling them to be wary of thinking themselves better than others, and to be wary of becoming so complacent in their status that they fail to help those in need.
- The Pharisees that Jesus is dining with as he tells this parable were so blind that they didn't care that the man who slipped into their dinner had dropsy and was suffering.
- They were so concerned that work shouldn't be done on a Sabbath, that they would rather a sick man continue suffering rather than be healed. That's a pretty incredible blindness, and why Jesus was often so harsh with the Pharisees.
- Hopefully, none of us are so hard of heart and so blind to the needs of others that we act like these Pharisees, or like the rich man in the parable. But it is always good to examine how we think about and treat others – whether we're guilty of rash judgment or omissions of charity.
- Meditating upon this Gospel, it's also good for us to ask ourselves if we are spiritually complacent because we are materially or financially blessed. Have we lost our sense of true dependence on God because we have enough of this world's goods to take care of ourselves?
- As we consider all this, it's also good for us to take the advice that St. Paul gives us today, to "pursue righteousness, devotion, faith, love, patience, and gentleness." To "compete well for the Faith" and thereby "lay hold of eternal life."
- As I've told you before, Heaven is not something anyone accidentally falls into. To go to Heaven when we die, we have to live now in a manner that shows to God that we desire salvation – especially with regard to how we treat those around us.
- We must be zealous, and never allow complacency and sloth to rule us.
- We also have to be rooted and grounded in charity, never judging the hearts or intentions of our fellow man, never looking down upon anyone – but believing, in humility, that everyone around us is actually better, holier, and more pleasing to God than we are.
- Brother and sisters, blessed as we are in this parish: financially, materially, and even spiritually, it would be easy for any of us to be complacent in our faith and judgmental of others. It would be easy for us to take for granted all that we've been given.
- May this never be the case. Indeed, may we always be grateful for our blessings.
- And like Lazarus, may we be ever aware of our poverty and our wounds, look to Christ for healing and nourishment, and humbly entrust ourselves to His eternal mercy.