

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen

Great reversals.

- You probably have experienced some of them and know what I mean.
- Both good and bad.
- They can be in regards to many things.

A person's health.

- The doctor says the future looks bleak.
- And then there is a great reversal.
- The patient gets healthier, the illness or problem seems to go away.....
- And the individual now looks like the poster child for good health.

Or, how about in sports.

- Football season has started.
- Your team comes out and plays the most miserable first half of football you can imagine.
- You are glad when the first half is over so you don't have to put up with the misery any longer.
- Your team limps into the locker room at half time losing and totally deflated.

But, they come out for the second half and don't even look like the same team.

- They play great and come back and win the game.
- As discouraged as you were before, you are now that excited.

One more example on a more serious note. It can be that way with your spirituality also.

- The individual has no interest in God or church.
- They live a life that reflects that.

But something changes.

- They become a different person and live and reflect the life of a disciple of Christ.
- Their testimony can be quite compelling.
- I wish we could have more of that.

But, unfortunately, there is also the opposite end of these reversals.

- A person can be the picture of health.
- They take care of themselves.

And something happens.

- Maybe it is a disease. Maybe it is just old age.
- Maybe it is both.
- And suddenly you even have trouble recognizing them and you wonder how much longer they have on this earth.

Or, the sports team.

- They look so good the first half.
- They looked unbeatable.
- But, the second half they are a totally different team.
- And you leave the game shaking your head, wondering what happened and dejected that your team lost the game.

And most tragically, this can happen in spiritual matters.

- A member is so active.
- Quite a joy and blessing to the church.

And something happens.

- They no longer attend church.
- Their heart has grown cold and it seems like a tall mountain to climb to get them back in church.

Our Gospel reading for today gives us an account of great reversals with eternal ramifications.

- Two people and they both experience great reversals.
- One for the good and one for the bad.
- These great reversals are what each experience as they are called home. As they are taken from this earth.

The story or parable given to us by Jesus in our Gospel reading is a bit of a strange one.....or at least one we are not used to hearing.

- It is only one story but it has a few spots along the way that it could have come to an end.....
- But our dear Lord continues to tell us the full account and all He wants us to hear and learn in the great reversal.

Allow me to go through the account, giving you a few more details and observation we may have missed from a casual read earlier.

- The story sets up a contrast between a rich man and a poor man.
- Their experiences on this earth are totally opposites, and then both have great reversals to experience the other extreme when they die.
- The rich man represents the Pharisees or all those who focus on themselves and worldly ways and by worldly standards have a good life here on earth.
- The poor man stands for all those outcasts of Jewish society or those who are downtrodden on this earth; whom Jesus' ministry makes special focus on.

The first part of the story introduces the rich man and his life.

- Obviously, he is rich.
- He dresses in fine clothes and feasts sumptuously every day.

This seems innocent enough but we need to recognize that the rich man has taken merry making to excess.

- Feasting was reserved for special occasions such as weddings or visiting of an honored person.
- The feast every day is a hyperbolic illustration of the improper use of possessions.
- The rich man is out of control.

And then there is a poor man.

- The poor man has a name—Lazarus.
- Please do not confuse this Lazarus with the Lazarus with Mary and Martha that was raised from the dead.

Lazarus' life is pathetic and to be pitied.

- Yet, unlike the rich man who is never given a name, Jesus names the poor man.....
- Suggesting his importance in God's sight and that his name is written in heaven.

Jesus spends more time describing the life and death of Lazarus.

- Lazarus is not a leper but he is full of sores.
- He is pictured as a beggar who must rely on other's help for survival.

He is cast at the gate of the rich man's house, where people come and go.....

- In the hope that the rich man and his feasting friends will have pity on him and give him something from their table.

But the rich man totally ignores him, even though later on we learn that the rich man knew Lazarus' name.

- The situation for Lazarus is such that the household dogs, who received the crumbs for which Lazarus begged, came and licked Lazarus' sores.
- Lazarus is so helpless that he is not able to keep the dogs away from him.

And here now we are introduced to the great reversal.

- Lazarus dies and is carried by angels to the bosom of Abraham.
- Lazarus may not have feasted at the rich man's table but he feasts now forever in the bosom of Abraham.

Conversely, all we are told of the rich man is that he died and was buried.

- The shortness and finality of the statement suggests that his destination was eternal death.

The story could have ended there.

- But Jesus continues on and the scene now shifts from earth to heaven and hell.
- The main focus is on the rich man and his conversation with Abraham.

We are given 2 bits of information.

- A description of the heavenly life of Lazarus in contrast to the eternal torment of the rich man.
- And a discussion of how to be prepared for the life of the age to come.

Looking up from the place of torment in Hades, the rich man sees Abraham from afar and Lazarus with him at the heavenly table.

- Lazarus and Abraham are clearly in heaven.
- The 2 places are separated but for the purposes of the story, are close enough that a conversation can take place.

The 2 realms are completely different.

- It is clear that hell is a place of torment.
- Heaven is a place of Messianic feast.

The rich man begins the conversation by asking “father Abraham” to have mercy on him.

- This tells us the rich man is a Jew and he claims that Abraham is his father.
- The rich man thought that by his heritage and who he was he had a place in heaven.
- But, the rich man refused to show fruits of repentance while on earth, including care for Lazarus.

Curiously, even though the rich man is now in Hades, he still does not speak words of repentance.

- He does seem to realize that his condition of torment is permanent.
- His cry for mercy is not a cry of repentance but a plea for help.

In fact, his status does not seem to affect his arrogance.

- He views Lazarus as a servant whom Abraham could send into his place of flames and cool his tongue with a drip of water.
- The rich man still thinks of himself and his needs before those of Lazarus.

Abraham addresses the rich man with intimacy and concern.....

- But he calls upon the rich man to remember what happened to him and to Lazarus during their lifetime.
- Abraham exhorts the rich man to remember the good things he received and his focus on worldly things and himself.....
- While Lazarus had received bad things (like hunger for the rich man’s crumbs).

But now the great reversal has taken place.

- Now Lazarus is comforted by God and the rich man is in torment.

And here again, the story could have been brought to a close.....but it is not.

- Jesus has more to say and teach us.

Abraham then describes to the rich man that between them a great chasm has been fixed that none may cross in either direction.

- And with that, the rich man finally thinks of someone besides himself.
- He now, too late for himself, thinks of his 5 brothers in his father’s house.

He wants Abraham to send Lazarus to bear witness to his family so they do not end up where he is.

- Interesting. While Lazarus was outside of the man's house at his gate, he paid no attention.
- But now the implication is that a miraculous appearance of someone from the dead will change their outlook.....
- And their behavior toward people like Lazarus so that they are not sent to eternal torment.

Abraham's reply is curt and pointed.

- They have Moses and the prophets. Let them hear them.
- Abraham is telling the rich man that if his brothers are to avoid torment in Hades, they must become hearers of the Word.

Once again, the story could have ended here.

- But Jesus still has more to say and teach.

The rich man speaks again.

- He again pleads Abraham to let someone from the dead journey to his brothers so that they might repent.
- The rich man now showing that he sees repentance is crucial.
- But he does not consider the Word of God sufficient to produce repentance.
- So, he desires a miraculous sign.

Abraham does not change his response with respect to God's Word but does add an intriguing final twist.

- If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, not even if someone were to rise out of the dead will they be persuaded.

Quite a story.

- What does this all mean for us?

There is a heaven and there is a hell.

- And there is quite a contrast between them.
- Heaven—a place of joy and eternal feasting.
- Hell—a place of torment and anguish.

And there is a great chasm between heaven and hell.

- At the time of death you are taken to heaven or hell and there is no crossing over once at your destination.

But there are also great reversals along the way.

- First, is the great reversal that Jesus has secured for us that man in his sinfulness and condemnation can have eternal feasting in heaven.
- By faith in Jesus, you can cross over from the brokenness of this sinful world to the blessedness of eternal life.
- But there is also the great reversal for those who enjoy and focus on this world and put their trust in themselves and material things.....a great condemnation and place of torment awaits them.

Reversals can go both directions.

- What are we to do?
- How do we have the ending that God desires for us and we want?

Dear fellow redeemed, it is not by chance.

- You have been given everything necessary to feast at the table of the heavenly throne.
- You have been given God's Word.

And you have seen Jesus risen from the dead.

- And you have been given faith in this Jesus.
- The rich man begged for Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool his tongue.
- Water, joined with God's Word, was poured over you at the baptismal font.
- You have been made a child of God.

And in a few minutes you will be invited to feast at the table of this altar partaking of the very body and blood of Christ.

- Christ literally dwelling in you.
- Giving you forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

No matter where you are at in your spiritual life—Jesus has died for you and He is reaching out His hand to lead you to your eternal home with Him.

- If you have been moving away from Christ.
- STOP. Turn around and latch on to His hand that is reaching for you.
- And you will experience a great reversal.

If you are already walking with Christ.....

- Squeeze His hand even harder. Don't let go.
- Continue the journey from this earth.
- Live a life of faith and repentance.....characterized by your love and care for those around you.

A feast without end has been prepared for and awaits each of us.

- Will you be there? Will we all be there?
- Let's all be there.
- On our own we are as helpless as Lazarus in the story who could not even keep the dogs away.
- Let's join together with Christ as He leads us to the joy that has no end.
- Not longing and looking for what could have been but instead secure in the arms of Jesus forever.
- Amen.

(Please stand) And now, may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Having heard the Word of God we now prepare our hearts and minds to confess together the words of the Nicene Creed as found on page 158 in your hymnal.