



"Jesus is my hope, and the living source of my happiness"
Padre Pio Prayer Groups, pilgrims of hope

SEVENTH SHRINE
April 2025

ABRAHAM'S BOSOM

BIBLE COMMENTARY

From the Gospel according to Luke (16:19-31)

There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. And he called out, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame". But Abraham said, "Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. And besides all this, 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." And he said, "Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house - for I have five brothers - so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment." But Abraham said, "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them". And he said, "No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent." He said to him, "If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead."

The aspiration to that eternity in which we will definitively contemplate God fully engages us even while on this earth: when we think of the things that are above, and get a sense of all the richness of life that flows from our Baptism, we are already experiencing a new life. Unfortunately though part of us belongs to the earth, and sometimes we can happen to live a reassuring faith, made up of rituals, pilgrimages, and even a measured charity, yet all of this still does not involve us wholly.

Not seeing Lazarus suffering at our door, finding easy justifications to isolate our Italian and European problems from those of the world, even with laudable exceptions, may give rise to communities that seek security in faith and not in prophecy. These are communities that want to get their ticket to heaven directly, without getting on the train of history and mission.

SPIRITUALITY

From Padre Pio's letter to Raffaelina Cerase (Letters II, PP 235-236)

I must add a further word to what has already been said, namely, to suggest the suitable means for the attainment of Christian perfection. The apostle (St Paul) suggests two most powerful means which are the constant study of God's law and the performance of all our actions for his glory.

As regards the first means, he writes to the Colossians: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God."

The apostle's doctrine is clear and does not need any comment. If the Christian is full of God's law which warns and teaches him to despise the world and its allurements, wealth and honours and all that



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prevents him from loving God, he will never fail no matter what adversities may befall him; he will endure everything steadfastly and perseveringly; he will readily forgive offenses, and give thanks to God for all things.

The apostle, moreover, wants God's law and Jesus' doctrine to be and to dwell abundantly in us. Now all this cannot come about unless we apply ourselves to reading Holy Scripture and books dealing with divine things, or else listening to God's word as expounded by holy preachers, confessors, etc.

Finally, the apostle wishes the Christian not to confine himself merely to knowing the divine law; he wants him to penetrate deeply into the meaning of it in order to be able to regulate his own life. None of this can take place without diligent application to meditation on God's law which makes the Christian exult with joy and chant sweet psalms and hymns to God. The Christian who is striving for perfection will understand, then, how very necessary meditation is.

As regards the other means of doing everything for God's glory, let us listen to the apostle's teaching: "Whatever you do," he says, "in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him."

By the faithful use of this simple means we do not merely keep far from any sin, but feel the continual urge to aim constantly at perfection.

We have come to the final part of the letter addressed to Raffaolina Cerase, in which Padre Pio commented on the passage from Colossians 3:1-11. The Resurrection of Jesus that we contemplate in this Easter season invites us to look at our life as the risen ones: "If you have risen with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God" (Col 3:1). In this letter, Padre Pio highlighted those divisions that arise in the heart of man who fails in this desire for eternity: "The Christians who forget their vocation, are Christians only by name, they are worldly Christians, and can judge things very differently. Quite the opposite is true of those Christians who live according to the spirit of Jesus Christ". It is precisely at the end of this description, that Padre Pio named the above mentioned two means how to achieve Christian perfection: "the continuous study of God's law and do everything for his glory."

Be role-models for Humility

As Padre Pio Prayer Groups we are called to live the missionary journey of the Church. We now know about the tools that make our journey a fruitful one – the Word of God and work for his glory – and to these we can add the attitude that those who work in the name of God must have: we must allow God to work continuously in us: "It is Jesus who loves you: surrender yourself to his holy deeds and do not be afraid because Jesus is with you and is pleased with you" (Epist. III, p. 217).

This action of God in our soul becomes the main means of our apostolate and Padre Pio - precisely in this letter - said this thing first of all about himself: "May God always be blessed who alone knows how to work such wonders, in a soul always reluctant to him, receptacle of infinite filth: he wanted to make me an example of grace; he wants to make me a model for all sinners. So that no one would despair. Let sinners therefore fix their gaze on me, especially among sinners, and hope in God" (Epist. II, p. 226).

Certainly in his humility, he believed that he was not worthy of what the Lord was working in him, but in fact he said a great truth: all sinners and those who are on a path of spiritual search, usually give in to God when they are able to perceive the work that the Lord can do in the heart of man.

Padre Pio was convinced of all this, in fact several times in his correspondence with his spiritual daughters he invited them to overcome trials and to be faithful to God so that he could glorify himself in them, for the good of souls. He wrote to the Ventrella sisters: "I will not cease to recommend that you should stand firm in the assurance that I am with you, in Jesus' sweetest presence. Work as you have been told, and Jesus will always remain glorified in you, and you will sanctify yourselves, and many souls will be glorified in you" (Epist. III, 549).



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I was hungry and you didn't recognize me

Paul showed us a painting, in which the divisions of those who are still attached to the mentality of this earth are contrasted with the life choices of those who aspire to be new human beings. We can find here the profound content of the mission that every Christian has to accomplish: in our own lives, we are to carry out the sanctifying work of God. "When Christ who is your life will manifest himself, then you also will be manifested with him in glory."

Only in the light of these considerations can we understand the reversals of perspective proposed by Pope Francis. Those Christians who live as the Risen One, who really want to lead a new life, do not limit to giving themselves in formal and rather detached charitable deeds, however abundant and constant these may be. All Christians are called to become aware of Lazarus, to recognise him as a person from the beginning.

In fact, the rich man represents the person tied to the land, the one who fails to make the leap in quality. Apparently he lives well, it looks like Lazarus does not even exist for him, he has his own world, but in fact he is an isolated person: he is despised to the point of being denied a name. Not only is it not known who he is, but he is a being without a history: he is condemned to isolation from his past (because he cannot even warn his brothers of his condition) and from his future, because no one who is in the "bosom of Abraham" can go towards him to bring him at least a drop of water.

The passage appears as an anticipation of the parable of Matthew 25: Jesus punishes those who did not recognize him, because he is present in every needy: "Go away from me, for I was hungry, thirsty, etc., but you did not recognize me."

The "bosom of Abraham" is the resting place of the righteous according to the Jewish conception at the time of Jesus: those who live their lives without recognizing him in the poor and hungry are excluded.

As for Lazarus, we can make an important observation.

Even the information about Lazarus is scarce; it is not known why he ended up being a beggar; with today's culture we could go so far as to say that it is his fault, and in reality more than begging he does nothing to "deserve" the prize; his poverty becomes the only reason for God's gratuitous intervention. But Jesus reiterates several times in the Gospel that salvation is a completely gratuitous work of the Father, who welcomes us as children; in the same way here, as on other occasions, he gives his predilection to the poor and needy, so that we too do the same, so that we too may live "in Abraham's bosom".

The Church and "Abraham's bosom"

The gratuitousness of salvation and the duty to merit it, recognizing Christ in the poor, seem two contradictory realities. In fact they do contradict each other if we place "Abraham's bosom" at the end of our life, at the moment of that judgment in which it will no longer be possible to choose between good and evil. Rather, let us try to consider things starting from baptism, as both the letter to the Colossians and Padre Pio address us. We are justified gratuitously in our Baptism, since we are given a new life. Since then we have become part of "Abraham's bosom", which is the Church. We are all like Lazarus, having been freely welcomed by God. The only real difference is that Jesus wanted for His Church to go through a visible, temporal phase.

Although, in fact, the Church is an anticipation of our ultimate life in God, it is still tied to time, conversion and change. For this reason we could find ourselves several times in the guise of Lazarus who begs, who is reduced to misery for a sin or for a life that has been bad to him. Every time God approaches us and shows us mercy. However, since we are still tied to time, at times we can also be the rich man, we can have a reckless use of the goods of the earth. And if Jesus tells us this parable, it is not to describe a permanent situation in which the rich man no longer has a past or future, but still he has the possibility of realizing his state, stopping, putting on the clothes of Lazarus because he is aware of his inner poverty and also waiting for mercy.



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Padre Pio's invitation is clear: "Moreover, the apostle wants the law of God, the doctrine of Jesus, to be in us, to dwell in us abundantly." We are thus a community that listens to the Word, understands everyone's role, and accepts their responsibility and the meaning of their mission.

Although our prayers may be truthful, and we attend our monthly meetings on the Word of God, these may remain sterile if we do not know how to review the attitudes that make us like the rich man; the ears that listen to the words, the eyes that see our beautiful functions are useless if they are not tied to a heart that makes us listen and see Lazarus licking his wounds outside the doors of our churches, our homes, our countries.

Let us say it clearly: the Church will never be missionary if its faithful are only concerned with putting together the small group of children who come to catechism, or with the organisation of a vigil night for the young. These are rather useful medium-term pastoral objectives, but they will be fully fulfilled if the various Lazarus of our society (the physically, spiritually, morally abandoned) know that they will not remain at the door but will be allowed to enter.

Let us no longer look at them as those who are far away (especially those who have distanced themselves from the faith, or who have a moral life made up of a thousand wounds) but let us call them the absent, that is, those who are missing, because if we do not welcome those who are at a crossroads, eventually there will be no banquet of the Kingdom of God.

PRAYER

Prayer of John Paul II

Like the two disciples in the Gospel,
we implore you, Lord Jesus, stay with us!
Divine Wayfarer,
expert in our ways and reader of our hearts,
do not leave us prisoners to the evening shadows.
Sustain us in our weariness,
forgive our sins
and direct our steps on the path of goodness.
Bless the children,
the young people, the elderly,
families and the sick in particular.
Bless the priests and consecrated persons.
Bless all humanity.
In the Eucharist,
you made yourself the "medicine of immortality":
give us the taste for a full life
that will help us journey on as trusting and joyful pilgrims on this earth,
our gaze fixed on the goal of life without end.
Stay with us, Lord!
Stay with us! Amen.

HYMN