

## 26C

*Once upon a time a man had a dream and he was taken to the next world. First of all he was given a vision of Hell and what he saw was people sitting at a long festive table which was laden with every kind of exotic food and delicacies. The snag was that they had to eat it with knives and forks which were five feet long. They were continually yelling their anger and frustration as the food lay temptingly before them and not one morsel could they put to their lips. Then the man was taken to Heaven and what he saw there was basically the same. The food was exactly similar. The knives and forks were the same length as in Hell but all were enjoying themselves. Those on one side of the table were using their knives and forks to feed the people on the other side.*

Dives was dressed in the most expensive clothes – purple and fine linen and he feasted sumptuously, not just now and again, but every day. To clean his fingers he used chunks of bread which he then tossed under the table where the dogs were waiting.

Lazarus would gladly have eaten these scraps of bread given half a chance but the dogs got there before him. The name Lazarus means 'God helps'. This means that he was a good man who put his trust in God even in the midst of want.

The rich man wasn't nasty towards Lazarus, he just ignored him. He pretended he wasn't there. St Vincent, whose feast we celebrate today, was the exact opposite in going out of his way to address the needs of the poor of his day.

Metaphorically speaking Lazarus still sits at our gate in all sorts of shapes and guises - the homeless, the refugees, the unborn baby, those who can't find work, in fact anyone in need of our love and care.

We keep seeing on the telly the emaciated faces of children suffering from food shortages as a result of war or drought while, we

like Dives throw vast quantities of food into the dust bin. Could those images be a form of Lazarus staring back at us from our TV screens while we sit down and eat to our hearts content? For a lot of people, however, Lazarus doesn't have a voice so he can be quietly ignored – just what the rich man did.

Some cultures also turn a blind eye to the Lazarus in their midst when, for instance, they practice infanticide, or turn a blind eye to the plight of children who work long hours for a pittance in very unhealthy environments.

In last Sunday's gospel Jesus says: "use your resources in this world to win you friends so that when you depart this life those same friends will be waiting for you to welcome you into paradise. If Lazarus had been treated fairly, he would have been a very useful contact for Dives 'on the other side' but the plight of Lazarus didn't stir his conscience at all and he ended up in what, to me, sounds like hell.

*On the day of Judgement, those on Christ's left hand will ask Him: 'When did we see you hungry, thirsty, naked or deprived.'? On how the Lord answers this question will go a long way towards deciding our eternal destiny.*