

26C

Once upon a time a man had a dream in which 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 long 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 dined on the best, not just now and again, but daily. To clean his fingers between each course he would use chunks of bread which were usually tossed under the table where the dogs were waiting to snap them up.

Lazarus would gladly have eaten these scraps of bread given half a chance. The name 'Lazarus' means 'God helps'. This means that he was a good man who put his trust in God, even in his misery.

The rich man wasn't harsh towards Lazarus, he just ignored him. He just blanked him out. St Vincent, whose feast we celebrated here on Friday, didn't ignore the terrible plight of the galley slaves of his day. He said: “the galley slaves are abandoned into the hands of merciless men. It is a slow death sentence. I saw these people treated like animals”. Vincent sought ways to give them both physical and spiritual assistance.

Metaphorically speaking Lazarus still sits at our gate in all sorts of shapes and guises - the homeless, those trafficked into slavery, the disabled the unborn baby, in fact anyone in need of our love and attention.

We keep seeing on the telly the hungry faces of children suffering from food shortages as a result of war or drought or global warming while we, like Dives, throw tons of food away. Are not these images a poignant example of present day Lazarus? For a lot of people, however, Lazarus doesn't have a voice so he can be quietly ignored – just what the rich man did.

A blind eye also tends to be turned to the plight of children in different areas of our world who work long hours for a pittance and 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 to welcome you into eternity. If Lazarus had been treated decently, 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. He kept on gorging himself.

On the day of Judgement, those on Christ's left hand will ask Him: 'When did we see you hungry, thirsty, naked, or in any need.'? His answer will determine their Eternal destiny.