

Some businesses display motivational posters throughout the workplace. Those posters have beautiful pictures accompanied by inspirational sayings. The hope is that expressions like “if you dream it, you can do it” and “teamwork makes the dreamwork” will elevate the quality of work and morale among the employees there.

A few years ago, a friend introduced me to “demotivators” – beautiful pictures with cynical and, well, demotivational sayings. Here’s a few. One says, “Apathy: if we don’t take care of the customer, maybe they’ll stop bugging us.” Or another that reads, “what’s the difference between ignorance and apathy? Don’t know; and don’t care.”

Initially, these posters make me laugh. The irony is sweet and they seem spot on. But they are funny, in part, because they reveal something that is, unfortunately, present in many of us. We can be apathetic, ignorant, and willfully callous toward others.

Today’s gospel parable touches on those sins of apathy, willful ignorance, and callousness toward others. The rich man isn’t considered sinful because he has wealth. The rich man’s sins are ones of omission. He fails to see, hear, and assist the poor man, Lazarus, who lies just outside his door. Imagine, someone in trouble – moaning, crying out in hunger or pain, a pack of dogs surrounding him and licking his sores outside of your front door. You’re going to notice him. But the rich man turned a blind eye

and a deaf ear to Lazarus. That is his sin. And that is our sin, as well.

We are often very aware of our sins of commission – lying, gossiping, stealing, or sins of lust and covetousness. Those are the sins we most often confess. However, we are usually less conscious of our sins of omission – those things we should have done but failed to do or refused to do – usually the result of our apathy, willful ignorance, and callousness toward others. Sins of omission are every bit as serious as the sinful actions we commit.

In my previous parish, we sponsored one of the largest food banks in all of Hillsborough County. That food bank was supported by our offertory and other generous supporters. The building we were using was falling apart. So we decided to build a new one, but financing the construction for a facility like that would be an uphill climb. I took out a loan to build that facility and begged for additional contributions. A rather wealthy man heard about what we were doing. I met with him to tell him and show him how this facility would help the “Lazarus” figure who was just outside of his door and my door. When the man saw the need, he wrote a check to help our parish put a sizable downpayment toward the building’s construction. Sometimes we have to help others see the Lazarus just outside our door. Today, that facility provides more than two million pounds of food each year for the hungry in Hillsborough County, on par with what *Feeding Tampa Bay* does in that same area.

Our parish is currently a part of a justice ministry in Pinellas County called FAST. We join with 40 churches of various

denominations to see to the availability of more affordable housing in our county or responding to mental health challenges that folks have all around us. Issues are raised in house meetings that our churches sponsor – groupings of 8-10 people who talk about what problems our local communities are facing. When I attend those house meetings, it is eye-opening to see and hear about the problems that are right outside our doors or right around the corner from us. Those meetings help all to see the “Lazarus” who is right in front of us and what his needs are.

Another aspect of this gospel parable that should challenge us is how the rich man treats Lazarus in the afterlife. Isn't it interesting that at this point of the story, the rich man NOW KNOWS Lazarus' name? Funny, he couldn't be bothered with him before while he was just outside his front door, but he knows him now. He tells Abraham that he should command Lazarus to bring some water to him because he is in agony in those eternal flames. Furthermore, he instructs Abraham to have Lazarus go to his sons and work on converting them so they don't end up like their father – in eternal damnation. The rich man, even in the afterlife, is treating Lazarus as his slave. He wants to use Lazarus for his own bidding. He has no respect for Lazarus as a person. He has no idea what Lazarus may need or want. Instead, the rich man wants only more for himself.

Friends, “Lazarus” is all around us. Maybe Lazarus is the person begging on the street. Maybe Lazarus is the migrant fleeing utter poverty, political oppression, or threats of retribution for attempting to simply provide for family. Maybe Lazarus is the child or teen who seems lost, is seeking guidance, or wants someone to accept them and love them simply for who they are.

Maybe Lazarus is the neighbor whose spouse just died and she is in need of a meal or shoulder to cry on. Maybe Lazarus is the person who can't find his car in the Publix parking lot and we risk being late to work to assist them.

Once a year I go to the optometrist to ensure that my vision is the best it can be. For the rest of my life, I want to be able to see, and that requires my time and attention. We come to Mass, we pray, we listen to one another in order to "see" as well. May we have spiritual vision which enables us to see the needs of others. May we have spiritual fortitude to see how we can really and practically help others. May we have spiritual courage to see what needs to be done when that need is right in front of us.

We don't need beautiful pictures or catchy phrases to help us do good. We need Christ. We need his eyes to see where people are wanting. We need his hands to feed and nourish those who are hungry. We need his heart to share God's limitless compassion with those who are struggling.

Today, September 28th, is the memorial of St. Wenceslas. On Sundays the focus at Mass is on the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Saints' days take a back seat to the paschal mystery we celebrate each Sunday. So, we don't "officially" celebrate St. Wenceslas today.

At Christmas time, you have no doubt heard a song about him. You might even recall part of the first verse of that song:

Good King Wenceslas looked out on the Feast of Stephen,
When the snow lay round about, deep and crisp and even.

(it's usually at this point that we hum the tune since we don't remember the rest of his story.)

But the life of St. Wenceslas has particular meaning for us in light of today's gospel. Wenceslas died in the year 935. He was the ruler of Bohemia, the land we now know as the Czech Republic.

Wenceslas was a good and holy ruler. He sought to instill the Christian way of life among those who ruled with him and throughout his kingdom. He was killed by his brother in a jealous rage while Wenceslas was attending a prayer service at one of the churches he supported. Throughout the Kingdom, Wenceslas was known as a faithful, kind, and compassionate ruler, especially to the poor.

The hymn "Good King Wenceslas" captures that spirit. The words to the hymn were written in 1853 although the tune dates back to the 1500s.

The hymn begins with Wenceslas looking out a window of his castle on the day after Christmas, the feast of St. Stephen. It was then that Wenceslas noticed a subject from his kingdom gathering wood for his hearth. It was snowing and a bitterly cold day. The hymn recalls how Wenceslas gathered food, wine, and pine logs for this man. Then, along with his page, they trekked through the snow to bring these essential goods to that man.

Like the rich man in today's gospel, St. Wenceslas was powerful and had unimaginable riches. But unlike the rich man in today's gospel, Wenceslas was very aware of those in need and

responded in kind to those needs. The last verse of the song captures that spirit. **

Friends, Lazarus is right in front of us. May we see him. May we see Christ in him. And may we be like Christ for him, as best we can.

Amen? Amen!

Good King Wenceslas

Good King Wenceslas looked out on the Feast of Stephen,
When the snow lay round about, deep and crisp and even.
Brightly shone the moon that night, though the frost was cruel,
When a poor man came in sight, gath'ring winter fuel.

“Hither, page, and stand by me, if you know it, telling,
Yonder peasant, who is he? Where and what his dwelling?”
“Sire, he lives a good league hence, underneath the mountain,
Right against the forest fence, by Saint Agnes’ fountain.”

“Bring me food and bring me wine, bring me pine logs hither,
You and I will see him dine, when we bear them thither.”
Page and monarch, forth they went, forth they went together,
Through the cold wind’s wild lament and the bitter weather.

“Sire, the night is darker now, and the wind blows stronger,
Fails my heart, I know not how; I can go no longer.”
“Mark my footsteps, my good page, tread now in them boldly,
You shall find the winter’s rage freeze your blood less coldly.”

** In his master's steps he trod, where the snow lay dinted;
Heat was in the very sod which the saint had printed.
Therefore, Christian men, be sure, while God's gifts possessing,
You who now will bless the poor shall yourselves find blessing.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SQVUMG6LZGM>