

Ordinary 26 C 2013  
Father Frank Matera  
If Only I Knew Then

At one time or another, all of us lament “if only I knew *then* what I know *now* I would never have acted in that way.” With twenty-twenty hindsight it is easy to review our past and determine what was right and what was wrong. And with such hindsight, we inevitably lament that if we knew *then* what we know *now*, our life would have been so different, so much better. But would it?

In today’s gospel a rich man looks back at the folly of his life, and he asks Abraham to send poor Lazarus to his five brothers to warn them what awaits them if they do not reform their lives. But Abraham responds that his five brothers already have the teaching of Moses and the Prophets, and if they do not listen to them they will not reform their lives, even if someone returns from the dead. And so we are left with the tragic story of a man who could have acted differently but did not because, when he was alive, he refused to learn from Abraham and the prophets. We are left with the tragic story of a man who could have learned from others but refused to. We are left with the tragic story of a man who lived in a foolish way even though he has the opportunity to learn from Moses and the Prophets.

If I only knew then what I know now, I would never have acted in that way! I suppose all of us think we would have lived our lives differently if we knew then what we know now. But I am not so sure. There is a certain tendency in all of us, no matter our age, to ignore those lessons from life that could help us even now, if we are willing to learn. There is a certain tendency in all of us to do it our way, a way that ignores the advice of those who have already travelled the road we are walking. This is why it is important to listen and learn from those who have gone before us. This is why it is important to listen and learn from the wisdom of our Catholic faith.

For example, in today’s second reading, St. Paul exhorts us to “pursue righteousness, devotion, faith, love, patience, and gentleness.” He reminds us to lay hold of that eternal life to which we were called when we were baptized, and he charges us to keep the commandments without stain until the appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ. In this brief instruction the great

apostle presents us with the wisdom and guidance we need to live a good and holy life now. In these words St. Paul teaches us how to live today in a way that we will not regret tomorrow.

Today's gospel presents us with another lesson of how to live today in a way we will not regret tomorrow. It teaches to be to be ever mindful of those less fortunate than ourselves. It teaches us that in God's time and in God's way there will be a reversal of fortunes, and if we wish to be on the right side of that of that reversal fortunes we must attend to those in need.

We cannot change the past, and it is futile to say that if I knew then what I know now. But we can avoid the mistake that the rich man of today's gospel made. We can avoid repeating his foolish behavior. By living in the way that Jesus teaches us in the gospel, we can live in a way we will not regret tomorrow.