

One day, as I was investigating whether I was called to the priesthood, I told Fr. Mick Lambeth, the Vocations Director, that I thought I was not ready yet for seminary, but I was looking for a next step. He said, "Come live with me at Sacred Heart Church in Trenton with some other guys discerning the priesthood." So, in the summer of 2002, I gave up my apartment and went to live at a Church while I was still working at Lockheed Martin.

It was quite an interesting experience, living at a Church and then going to work in the corporate world during the week. I also was living on South Broad Street, not too far from the State Capital buildings. It was an extremely poor and depressed area. On the road behind the Church were the "Towers" – two gigantic subsidized housing units for the working poor. Next door to us was another smaller building for the disabled poor. We also used one of the buildings for EL Centro – an outreach to the families in the Latino community. They did a lot of work supporting families and helping them get work.

The generosity of the people was amazing. We had a food pantry and would get shipments from the local food bank. People would take what they needed and share with their neighbors. But there were so many sad "Charity cases" I encountered. It really challenged me. Here I was, a successful young engineer with all kinds of extra cash, and these folks could not even afford food. Many struggled with addictions. The children were all trying to avoid being recruited by local gangs. One thing I tried to do with those begging was talk to them like people.

I remember Edna. I was repulsed by her ears damaged from having earrings ripped out by men who abused her and that look of lost desperation on her face. She had young children and would often stop by for money even though she knew we didn't give money out. I would make her a sandwich and go get an extra bag of food from the pantry downstairs. But I cried at the realization I could not save her or her kids stuck in this vicious cycle.

Occasionally, against my better judgment, I did give her money anyway. I had thought to myself – “it must be easier not having any money to give.” I realized then that stewardship is hard. We who have been given resources are called to help those with less. It’s the simple lesson we learned in kindergarten – sharing is caring.

But it is not so simple, we say. How do we be good stewards of our resources?

The Gospel today shows a Rich Man, who dined sumptuously each day and wore expensive garments and fine linen. I think he drove a Mercedes CLS class. This rich dude would not even give his scraps to the poor Lazarus begging at his door.

And Jesus pulls no punches today. Where did the Rich man wind up when he died? Yes, Hell. But the unnamed rich man did not go to hell because he was rich or because he was a shrewd businessman.

He wound up in torment in hell, because he failed to love his neighbor. God provided him with an easy opportunity. Yet, the Rich man was too repulsed and distracted by his wealth to bother.

The Youth Catechism (Youcat) #161 defines Hell = “the everlasting separation from God, the absolute absence of love.” [CCC1031]

We might say, God is so mean. But Youcat #162 says “God does not damn men. Man himself is the one refuses God’s merciful love and *VOLUNTARILY* deprives himself of (eternal) life by excluding himself from communion with God.” God’s gift of free will is a two-edged sword.

Someone who consciously and with full consent dies in serious sin, without repenting and refuses God’s merciful, forgiving love forever excludes himself from Communion with God and the saints. #161

The Rich Man, by his lack of charitable love and lack of concern for Lazarus, rejected God’s love. Remember who Jesus identifies himself with? In Matthew Chapter 25: *“What you did not do for one of these least one, you did not do for me.”* Jesus identifies not with the rich and powerful, but with the hungry, the naked, the stranger, the imprisoned. We can add many of those struggling people we pass by every day on the street, or at work or in school or at the store.

I hope today we can reflect on the fact that being blessed with resources and comfort and wealth is good, but it is also a call to service. Jesus tells us we are to look for the Lazaruses in our lives, the “charity cases.” They could be the poor, the vulnerable, the abused, the lonely, the disabled, the lost, the desperate. Not just the financially poor like Edna’s family, whom certainly live not too far from St. Catharine’s and many whom we support each month.

But they are also to be found in our daily travels. And we are given the opportunity each day, like the Rich man, to use our gifts and talents and resources to serve those Lazaruses around us. Or we can choose, like the Rich man, to ignore Lazarus and paved our path to eternal torment in the absence of love.

Today, may we, with Jesus’ merciful help, make a commitment to be Good Stewards and pave our path to eternal life with our loving God.