

PREGO PLUS: BACKGROUND NOTES

TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, YEAR C

Psalm 145 (146)

This is the first of the last five psalms of the Psalter, each of which begins with the word 'Alleluia', the Hebrew expression for 'Praise [*hallelu*]' the Lord'. Here the psalmist refers to the Lord by name repeatedly: nine times in all. God's providence does not only concern one particular event; it is everywhere and omnipresent.

The psalm also looks forward to the miracles of Jesus in the Gospels: feeding the 5000 (Matthew 14: 13–21) – **giving bread to the hungry**; the blind man at Jericho (Luke 18: 35–43) – **giving sight to the blind**; the widow's mite (Mark 12: 38–44) – **upholding the widow**, etc.

Jesus's reading of the prophet Isaiah in the synagogue in Nazareth (Luke 4: 16–22) and Mary's Magnificat (Luke 1: 46–55) also come to mind.

This psalm reminds us that the Lord always favours the poor. If we are to be members of God's holy people ourselves, we, too, should behave towards the immigrant, the orphan and the widow, as God behaved towards the Israelites when they were immigrants, orphans and widows in Egypt.



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'It is the Lord who gives bread to the hungry ...'

Gospel Luke 16: 19–31 (The rich man and Lazarus)

This week's Gospel follows on from last Sunday, and deals with attitudes to money and possessions. Both stories occur only in Luke 16. This week's parable is sometimes called 'Dives and Lazarus', where Dives simply means 'rich' in Latin, while 'Lazar' denotes a person infected with a repulsive disease. Similar tales existed in Egyptian popular folklore and were told by Rabbis at the time; this may be an adaptation of such a story.

Jesus is here addressing the **Pharisees**, whom he has just described as people 'who were lovers of money' (v. 14). They were known for punctilious observance of the Law and their belief in life after death, seeing themselves as the children of Abraham.

There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen ...

These few words immediately set the scene. Both items of clothing could only be worn by a very wealthy person. The purple dye, made from a certain type of sea snail found on the coast of Syria and Palestine, was very expensive, as were the fine Egyptian linen undergarments.

And at his gate, was laid a poor man named Lazarus

Another indication of the man's great wealth: he lives in a gated mansion. The word translated here as 'laid' also implies the idea of being 'dumped' or 'thrown' out there. Lazarus did not go there of his own volition: the emphasis is on his helplessness.

His only status is his name: indeed, he is the only main character in a parable of Jesus with their own name. (This Lazarus is not the same man as the brother of Mary and Martha, the friend whom Jesus raises to life in John 11. 'Lazarus' became a popular Greek name during New Testament times, meaning 'God has helped').

... what fell from the rich man's table

During a banquet, guests would use bread to wipe their plate or their greasy hands and throw it under the table where dogs would eat the scraps.

... to Abraham's side

A contemporary Jewish term for the place where the godly went to await the general resurrection at the end of time. It may allude to the heavenly banquet where the place of honour was next to the host; the guest could recline at the host's side. Conversely **Hades** (in Hebrew 'Sheol') was the underworld, the abode of the dead, here described as a place of torment.

'Father Abraham, have mercy on me and send Lazarus ...'

Being a child of Abraham does not guarantee salvation. Even from his torment, the rich man still behaves as the Master, and tries to give orders. He is being punished not for being wealthy, but for being indifferent to the plight of the poor.