

## PREGO PLUS: BACKGROUND NOTES

### TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, YEAR C

#### Second Reading 1 Timothy 6: 11–16

For the past two weeks, we have been reading and praying the First Letter to Timothy and are now coming to the final chapter. For more information about this text, please see the Prego Plus for the Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time.

Timothy was a close companion of Paul, born of mixed Jewish and pagan parents. He accompanied Paul on several missions after their first meeting in Lystra (Acts 16: 1–2). Timothy is 'a man dedicated to God': an expression often applied to Prophets in the Old Testament (as, for example, in Deuteronomy 33: 1). It draws attention to the spiritual responsibility of Church leaders.

The language used here is one of conflict: '*Fight the good fight*'. Professing that Jesus is Lord publicly, possibly on the occasion of Timothy's baptism, was an act of subversion towards Roman forces. Calling God '*King of kings, Lord of lords*', terms normally reserved for the Roman emperor, was equally daring.

The final doxology, comprising words of praise to God, was probably a known hymn, of Greek-Jewish inspiration. It stresses God's transcendence and superiority over earthly rulers.

*Fight the good fight with all thy might,  
Christ is thy strength, and Christ thy right;  
Lay hold on life and it shall be  
Thy joy and crown eternally.*

#### 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 (Ch. 16); the one on this week is sometimes called 'Dives and Lazarus', although Dives is not a proper name and simply means 'rich' in Latin. Similarly, 'Lazar' in Latin denotes a person infected with a repulsive disease, though during New Testament times 'Lazarus' was a popular Greek name, meaning 'God has helped'. Similar tales existed in Egyptian popular folklore and were told by Rabbis at the time; it is possible that we are reading an adaptation of such a story.

Jesus is here addressing the Pharisees whom he has just described as people 'who loved 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 used to dress 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.

#### **At his gate, there lay a poor man called Lazarus**

Another indication of the man's great wealth: he lives in a gated mansion. The word translated here as 'lay' also implies the idea of being 'dumped' or 'thrown' out there. Lazarus did not go there of his own volition. The stress 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 person as the brother of Mary and Martha, Jesus's friend who comes back to life in John's Gospel (John 11).)

#### **The scraps that fell from the rich man's table.**

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

#### **The bosom of Abraham**

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 on the host's bosom. Conversely **Hades** (in Hebrew Sheol) was the underworld, the abode of the dead, here described as a place of torment.

#### **Father Abraham, pity 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.

