

JESUS CALLS US TO BE WITNESSES IN THE DIGITAL WORLD  
SOCIAL JUSTICE SUNDAY  
26<sup>th</sup> Sunday Ordinary Time Year C, 29<sup>th</sup> September 2019

**TODAY'S GOSPEL | A REVERSAL PARABLE**

Today's Gospel parable of Jesus tells of an unnamed rich man, and Lazarus a poor man. It is a reversal parable.

We can apply it to circumstances where the dignity of a person is ignored or overlooked, where the human rights of a group are disregarded, where a person or group of people are made 'invisible'.

And even though a person or group in power think they have succeeded, God knows and God does not forget.

Some examples include:

- The apartheid time in South Africa
- Extermination of ethnic groups in history
- Legislating against the rights of the unborn
- Silence where corruption exists in business
- Cover-up of sexual abuse in churches, in community groups, in institutions, in families and in relationships
- Degradation of the environment
- Child pornography on the internet
- Covering up of domestic violence in society
- Covering up of human slavery and human trafficking
- Injustice against minorities.

**FOCUS ON THE AMAZON**

In reflecting on the *Amazon region*,

**WHO ARE 'THE RICH MAN' AND 'LAZARUS' IN THE AMAZON STORY TODAY?**

From October 6<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup>, Pope Francis will highlight the Amazon Region, by convening ['The Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for the Pan-Amazonian Region.'](#)

Its theme will be "*Amazon: new paths for the Church and for an integral ecology*".

Its focus will include

- the life of people
- the life of church communities
- the health of Amazon biodiversity,
- and their relationship to the world community.

**DIGITAL WORLD**

In reflecting on the way the *digital world operates*,

**WHO ARE 'THE RICH MAN' AND 'LAZARUS' TODAY?**

## POPE FRANCIS | POSITIVE & NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF THE DIGITAL WORLD

Pope Francis, in recognizing positive and negative aspects of our digital world, describes it as:

*'a public square, a meeting place  
where we can either encourage or demean one another,  
engage in meaningful discussion or unfair attacks...  
Access to digital networks entails a responsibility for our neighbour  
whom we do not see but who is nonetheless real  
and has a dignity which must be respected...  
The encounter between communication and mercy  
will be fruitful to the degree that it generates a closeness which cares,  
comforts, heals, accompanies and celebrates.'*

## MAKING IT REAL | GENUINE HUMAN ENCOUNTER IN OUR DIGITAL WORLD

This weekend the Australian Catholic Bishops focus on the national Social Justice Statement *'MAKING IT REAL'* with its sub-title *'Genuine Human Encounter in our Digital World'*. All are invited to read the [Statement](#). Other [resources](#) are also available.

Let us analyse together the digital world and

- its advantages and its disadvantages,
- its strengths and its weaknesses,
- its blessings and its sinfulness,
- its presentations of humanity and the earth our common home

## GOSPEL OF LUKE 16:19-31

In the today's Gospel passage, Jesus tells a parable of a rich man, a poor man and Father Abraham. The rich man wears the finest fashions in clothing, and feasts every day on the finest food.

We could say that he has access to luxury every day. He has access to power, to opportunity, to wealth. But Jesus does not give him a name. In a sense, he is all of us, at those times, when we don't care for others, when we fail to love our neighbour.

The poor man is given a name. He is called Lazarus. Jesus tells us:

*'And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores.'*

*'The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried.'*

The parable is meant to stand out.

## HOW MANY OTHER PARABLES OF JESUS

- NAME ONE OF THE CHARACTERS, AND
- PLACE ABRAHAM IN AUTHORITY?

This parable is unique.

Today we see Lazarus in the poor, the marginalized, the oppressed, the homeless, victims and survivors of injustice, sexual abuse, domestic violence and many others who are forgotten by people who have access.

The rich man does not go out to encounter Lazarus as a person of dignity.

## IN THE DIGITAL WORLD, HOW DO WE ENCOUNTER PEOPLE IN THEIR DIGNITY?

**With its many advantages**, the digital world has made a huge **difference** to **our way of life**.

And with that **access comes responsibility**, including the **protection of the dignity of all who might be 'Lazarus' in the digital world**.

One aspect of that protection is called eSafety.

## DO WE KNOW HOW TO ACCESS ESAFETY MEASURES IN AUSTRALIA?

### DIGITAL SAFETY | eSAFETY

The [Australian Government eSafety website](#) describes the eSafety mission:

*'The eSafety Commissioner is responsible for promoting online safety for all Australians. We are committed to helping all Australians have safer, positive experiences online — just as they would offline.*

*The Office co-ordinates and leads the online safety efforts of government, industry and the not-for-profit community.*

*It has a broad remit which includes providing:*

- *a complaints service for young Australians who experience serious cyberbullying*
- *identifying and removing illegal online content*
- *tackling image-based abuse.*

*The Office also provides audience-specific content to help educate all Australians about online safety including young people, women, teachers, parents, seniors and community groups.*

*Our goal is to empower all Australians to explore the online world—safely.'*

It explains the structure:

*'The eSafety Commissioner is responsible for promoting online safety for all Australians. Staff of the Australian Communications and Media Authority assist the eSafety Commissioner perform her functions and exercise her powers.'*

*'The Office of the eSafety Commissioner has offices in Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra. It has eight sections that are supported by the eSafety Commissioner's Corporate Team.'*

Some helpful links are:

<https://www.esafety.gov.au/about-the-office/role-of-the-office>  
<https://www.esafety.gov.au/esafety-information/helpful-websites>  
<https://www.esafety.gov.au/complaints-and-reporting>

#### A DIGITAL COALITION OF THE WILLING

It is not only governments that are responsible for digital safety and protection of the dignity of all.

We all need to work together.

The Church has to be proactive.

Let us hear of one such coalition of the willing.

#### OCTOBER 2017 | WORLD CONGRESS: CHILD DIGNITY IN THE DIGITAL WORLD

In October 2017, a [World Congress: Child Dignity in the Digital World](#), presented their Declaration of Rome to Pope Francis.

Pope Francis supported the declaration and its work for global action.

Its future direction is explained:

*'The Centre for Child Protection (CCP) of the Pontifical Gregorian University in partnership with the WePROTECT Global Alliance and SOS Il Telefono Azzurro Onlus will use the Declaration of Rome as a platform on which to build a coalition of the willing.*

*That coalition will turn the general goals of the Declaration into global action.'*

On one of its links we hear about some of the issues and needs in its strategic plan.

<https://www.childdignity.com/working-group>

- **PREVENTION RESEARCH**

'A research group that aims to identify, evaluate, improve and disseminate the best prevention policies and practices for child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA) internationally.'

- **GLOBAL FOUNDATIONAL RESEARCH ON HARMS TO CHILDREN IN THE DIGITAL WORLD**

'A research group, with a broader focus, that aims to utilise Prof. Caffo's wide academic network to survey current research being conducted on CSEA, to identify gaps in the foundational understanding of where, why, how and when CSEA occurs and to fill these gaps in knowledge from the creation of new research.'

- **BUILDING GLOBAL AWARENESS**

'A communications working group that aims to raise global awareness of CSEA and its impact through a focused and multifaceted PR strategy, created and run with the support of Harvard PR.'

- **BUILDING A MULTI-FAITH COALITION TO PROTECT CHILDREN IN THE DIGITAL WORLD**

This groups aims to call to action religious leaders from all faiths at all levels,

to raise their awareness of the prevalence and severity of CSE internationally, so they can use their influence within their communities to safeguard children from abuse and exploitation...'

## **PROTECTING CHILDREN FROM INTERNET PORNOGRAPHY**

'A "lobbyist" group that aims to use of the momentum of the enactment UK Age Verification Law... They aim to replicate the UK's AV Law in every country in the world.'

### **• TECHNOLOGY AND ITS IMPACT UPON CHILDREN**

'A combined research and "lobbyist" group with the broad aims of identifying the abuses that are harming children on internet platforms and products of tech companies, using technological innovation to offset these abuses, and persuading tech companies to invest in these solutions, whilst promoting a 'safety by design' approach for startups and new products of established tech companies.'

## **POPE FRANCIS AND COMMUNICATION**

Pope Francis on Monday 23rd September gave two inputs to the Dicastery for Communication at the Vatican.

He gave a prepared written address and a more engaging verbal address.

Let us conclude with some his reflections in these addresses on communication.

*'You communicate with the soul and the body;  
you communicate with the mind, the heart, the hands;  
you communicate with everything.  
The true communicator gives everything...  
And it is true that the greatest communication is love:  
in love there is the fullness of communication: love for God and among us.'*

*'And our communication must be witness... Christians are witnesses'*

*'Communication in the Church can only be characterized  
by this principle of participation and sharing.  
Communication is truly effective only when it becomes witness, that is,  
a participation in the life that is given to us by the Spirit  
and enables us to discover we are,  
in communion with each other, members of each other.'*

*'I also encourage you... to seek with ingenuity and creativity  
all ways of strengthening the network with the local Churches.  
I encourage you in this to also encourage the formation  
of digital environments in which people communicate,  
and do not just connect.'*

## **MUSICAL | NEXT TO NORMAL**

While reflecting on *'the rich man'* and *'Lazarus'* in the parable of Jesus,

many of us will attend the musical *'Next to Normal'* which communicates and deepens our understanding of mental health. Thank you to all who have made this presentation a local opportunity as we prepare for [Mental Health Week in October](#).

As a parish family,

- May we communicate the message of the Gospel with others.
- May we communicate with people, and not just connect.
- May we seek with ingenuity and creativity.
- May we seek the love of God, and God's love among us.
- May we encounter others with mercy.
- May we be in communion with each other.
- May we be witnesses to Jesus in the digital world.

Let us pray.

Fr. Gerry

[Readings: <http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/092919.cfm>]



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Fr. Gerry Hefferan

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