

□ Reading time: 4 min.

### *The wealth that risks making us blind and deaf*

The parable of the rich man and poor Lazarus found in Luke's Gospel, chapter 16:19-31, is not simply a story about the fair distribution of material wealth. It is a narrative that penetrates the heart of the human condition, confronting us with a disturbing question: who truly possesses whom? Did the rich man possess his wealth, or did his wealth possess him, transforming him into its slave?

This inversion of perspective opens up a space for deep reflection. The man in the parable was not condemned for stealing or exploiting, but for becoming blind and deaf. His tragedy was not in having, but in not seeing and not listening. He lived in a world reduced to the sole dimensions of his home, his possessions, his immediate well-being. At his door lay Lazarus, covered in sores that dogs came to lick, but that poor man had become invisible, his silent cry inaudible.

### **Existential wealth**

When we speak of wealth, we immediately tend to think of money, material possessions, economic success. But there is a more subtle and pervasive wealth: existential wealth. It is the wealth of those who are well, who have found their comfort zone, who live surrounded by positive relationships, gratifying experiences, reassuring certainties. It is the wealth of a functioning community, of a group where one feels welcomed, of an environment where everything flows pleasantly.

This existential wealth is a gift, no doubt. It is right to enjoy it, celebrate it, realise the beauty of what one experiences. But precisely here lies the most insidious danger: that of closing oneself off in this abundance, of transforming the space of well-being into a gilded ghetto, separated from the surrounding reality.

The rich man in the parable lived like this. He lacked nothing, yet he lacked everything: he lacked the ability to see beyond himself, to perceive the other, to be touched by the reality pressing at his door. His wealth had become an invisible prison, with bars made of habit, indifference, and self-referentiality.

### **The blindness and deafness of comfort**

The comfort zone is one of the most dangerous concepts of modernity. It deludes us into thinking that well-being is a right to protect rather than a gift to share. It convinces us that preserving our balance is more important than opening ourselves to the cry of others. It whispers to us that we have already done enough, that we can finally relax, that other problems do not concern us directly.

The rich man's blindness was not physical but spiritual. He saw his palace, his

clothes, his lavish table. But he did not see Lazarus. Not because Lazarus was hidden, but because the rich man had developed that particular form of blindness that filters reality, allowing only what confirms his own worldview to pass through. And there was also deafness. The text reveals this second defect when the man, from the afterlife, begs Abraham to send someone from the dead so that his brothers might listen. But it was he who had not listened! He was deaf to the silent cry of poverty, to that suffering that does not scream but subsists, that does not disturb but exists, that does not demand but waits.

### **Inner listening as an indispensable condition for outer listening**

How can this dual paralysis of blindness and deafness be overcome? The answer does not lie in a simple effort of will or in a programme of social activities. The answer lies in a deeper conversion; we cannot see Christ in the poor if we do not contemplate Christ within ourselves. We cannot hear the cry of the vulnerable if we are not attuned to the voice of God in our hearts.

The great witnesses of charity – from Don Bosco to Mother Teresa of Calcutta – did not start from a sociological analysis of poverty, but from a mystical experience of God's love. Their ability to see, listen, and respond externally arose from an intense inner life, from a contemplation that was not an escape from the world but a preparation for encountering the world.

This is the paradox. The deeper one descends into the depths of one's heart to recognise God's love there, the more one acquires the ability to step out of oneself to meet the other. Spiritual life is not a narcissistic withdrawal, but the necessary training to develop that sensitivity that allows us to perceive Christ wherever He manifests Himself.

### **Mission as sharing wealth**

Every person is a mission. This statement does not mean that we must all become frantic activists or engage in grandiose projects. Rather, it means that the wealth we have received – material, cultural, spiritual, existential – is not our exclusive property but a gift intended for circulation.

One who loves sets themselves in motion, steps out of themselves, allows themselves to be attracted and in turn attracts. Love is dynamic by nature; it cannot be accumulated, preserved, locked away in a comfort zone. Either we share it, or we lose it. Either we circulate it, or it corrupts.

The challenge, therefore, is not to renounce existential wealth, but to possess it in a different way; not as jealous owners but as generous stewards; not as final recipients but as channels of transmission; not as a point of arrival but as a starting

point for new paths of sharing.

### **Creative minority and signs of hope**

In a world marked by growing inequalities and structural indifference, those who choose not to become blind and deaf necessarily become a minority. But this is a creative minority, capable of igniting even small but certainly contagious lights of hope.

Hope is neither naive optimism nor passive resignation. Hope is a person, Christ, who continues to challenge us through every Lazarus who lies at the door of our existence. To recognise Him there, in the disfigured face of the poor, in the silent cry of the excluded, in the ignored suffering of the vulnerable, is the only way not to become slaves to our wealth, not to end up consumed by our own well-being.

The parable leaves us with an urgency. Today, now, before it is too late, to open our eyes and ears to the reality around us. Because tomorrow, on the other side, it will be useless to regret not having seen and heard.