

Recently I received a summons for jury duty. Prior to this I have been summoned twice, been selected twice, and served as foreman twice. Jackson County will excuse clergy from jury duty, but I like to serve if I can. This time, however, I found the courthouse filled with over 200 potential jurors for one case, a double homicide which originated from an argument over \$20. The judge intended to sequester the jury for four days, possibly up to seven including a weekend, so I claimed my clergy exemption. Last week the selected jury found this defendant guilty, but they could not agree on the penalty--life or death. In the United States, most people, and I'm sure most Catholics, want the death penalty legal, even though our bishops and the pope himself have condemned it. Still, put 12 Americans on a jury, and they rarely apply the death penalty in one specific case. It happens, but not as often as it could. Somewhere inside the American heart is still lodged a respect for human life, even for the life of a murderer.

The rich man in today's parable, however, shows no such human respect. Dressed in fine clothes he feasts sumptuously and selfishly every day. Even with a poor, hungry, wounded beggar at the gate, he offers not even the scraps from the banquet floor. When they both die, the rich man still treats the beggar as a servant. He says, "Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; send him to my father's house that he may warn them." He believes the weak are here to wait on him.

Here at St. Regis it's not difficult to find people who care for the weak. Our members assist the St. James Soup Kitchen, visit the county jail, support a sister community in El Salvador, offer food to the Community Assistance Council (our neighborhood social service agency), and contribute to our own emergency assistance fund for those who struggle to make ends meet. Family after family in this parish respects the unborn, welcomes a new child, sacrifices for Catholic education, cares for the elderly, and nurses the sick. We are not the wealthiest parish in the diocese, but we are blessed, and we give from what we have--our time, our talent, our treasure--to care for those in need.

Today's parable has had far-reaching effects. In jury rooms, parishes and homes around the world, people take seriously our obligations to care for others. We belong to the wealthiest nation in the history of the world. God will continue to bless us and reward us if as a nation, as a parish, and as families we continue our efforts to share what we have.