

# MANNA *in the wilderness*

January 2002

The Newsletter of the Las Vegas Catholic Worker

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## The Rich Man & Lazarus Are Still With Us

By Fr. Michael Blackburn, OFM

In this life, some people clearly have the advantage over others. In many cases, this difference begins at the moment of birth. One baby is born in a clean hospital to a devoted mother, while a grateful father eagerly participates. The delivery is attended by a skilled doctor, and waiting at home is a well-equipped nursery, where the child will be given constant care. Another baby is born in a street shelter to a cocaine-addicted mother. No doctor is there to help. No anxious and eager father is present. In fact, his identity and whereabouts are both a matter of mystery. No nursery is waiting at home. Indeed, there is no home. Where the child will be reared and by whom are open questions. It is plain to see that the first baby has a clear advantage over the second.

The difference can be seen at every stage of life, and no one saw it more clearly than Jesus. In the Gospel (Luke 16:19) he told a story about a rich man and a beggar. They lived in the same time and place, but their styles of living were as different as night and day. One lived in a mansion, the other lay at his gate. One "feasted splendidly every day", the other "longed to eat the scraps that fell from the rich man's table". One was apparently in good health, the other "was covered in sores". Then death, the great equalizer, entered. And all of this was drastically changed. The poor man was carried by the angels to the bosom of Abraham. But the rich man suffered torment in the abode of the dead.

Jesus told this story 2,000 years ago but we still tell it today because the rich man and Lazarus are still with us. They have been a part of every society in every generation. We have almost gotten used to them and hardly notice the difference of their existence. But Jesus did not become adjusted to it. He never got used to the idea that some people eat well everyday, while others go hungry. In the telling of this story, Jesus reveals two things about himself. One was his deep compassion for the disadvan-

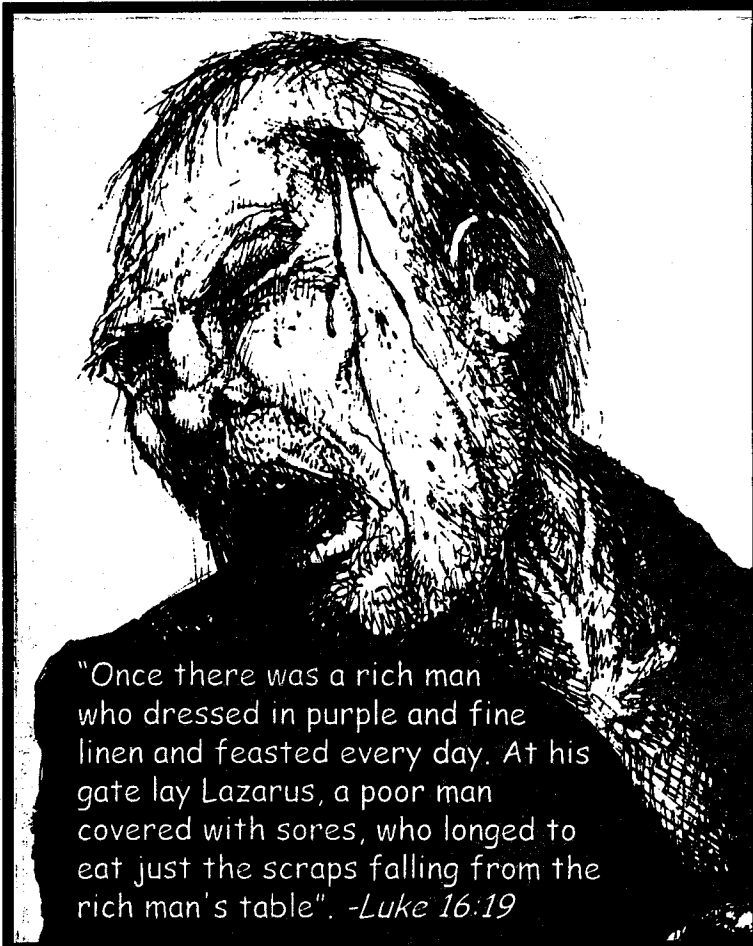
taged. He was always on the side of the downtrodden. Most of us understand that about him. Though we may not always share his compassion, at least we know how he felt about the poor. But how many of us have seen this other matter- his concern for the rich? Remember, he told this story to the Pharisees. They were the privileged people. And Jesus was appealing to them not to allow that fact to ruin their lives. He knew advantages are hard to handle.

Advantages make it difficult for us to

per and find in it stories of grown men and women who can neither read nor write. How different all these people seem from us. It would be easy to stand above them, look down upon them, and secretly celebrate our superiority. But is it so? Take away our houses, our bank accounts, our well-stocked refrigerators, and what kind of people would we be? Is our quality a real thing, or just an illusion created by the fortunate circumstances that surround and sustain us? Advantages are hard to handle, because

they make it difficult for us to see ourselves as we really are.

Advantages also make it difficult for us to feel what is wrong with the world. Remember, Jesus told this story to the Pharisees, some of whom were wealthy. Most of them were prominent in the community, holding positions of power and influence. All of them were strong patriots, committed above all else to preserving the racial purity and religious traditions of their nation. Ask them what was wrong with the world and they would probably have pointed to the tax collectors and sinners. Tax collectors worked with foreigners. They worked for the Roman government. Sinners were not necessarily moral derelicts. Most of them were just



"Once there was a rich man who dressed in purple and fine linen and feasted every day. At his gate lay Lazarus, a poor man covered with sores, who longed to eat just the scraps falling from the rich man's table". -Luke 16:19

see ourselves as we really are. Jesus gave us two pictures of the rich man. In the first, he is surrounded by all kinds of advantages. He lives in a mansion. He wears the finest clothes money can buy. He eats the finest foods. No doubt he thought of himself as inherently superior to the beggar who lay at his gate. He was totally independent, needing nothing or no one. In the second picture, all of that is stripped away. He has none of the trappings of wealth. And we see him as a beggar, just like the poor Lazarus.

It is so easy for you and me to make that same mistake. We look at our nice houses, then we see the homeless sleeping on the streets. We enjoy an abundant meal, then retire to the television and see pictures of starvation in some distant place. We read a newspa-

ordinary people who did not observe every little detail of the law. To the Pharisees, these two groups represented what was wrong with the world. If Rome could be driven out, and if everyone scrupulously kept the law, then all would be well.

Ask Lazarus, the poor beggar, what was wrong with the world and I'm sure his answer would be a lot different. His concern was not the Roman rule or religious rituals. He did not care who ran the government or who kept the Sabbath and how. Those were probably the last things on his mind. He was sick, homeless and hungry. What he needed was someone to care. A few years ago the evening news showed a mother in Somalia squatting beside her little boy who had just died of starvation. Through

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an interpreter she said: "I had six children. Now all of them are dead. This was the last one". That woman knew better than most what is wrong with the world. Not only did she know it, she felt it, way down deep in her gnawing stomach and aching heart.

You and I come at the world's problems from another direction. We are aware of them. We have read about them. We have seen them on T.V. But our knowledge is from afar. It's one thing to know about pain, but it is another to feel pain in one's body and soul. The rich man was not ignorant of Lazarus. He had seen him many times. He had watched him eat table scraps. He knew about suffering the same way many of us do- he had seen it. But a day came when his wall of protection was torn down. His advantages were taken away. And for the first time the rich man knew what it was like to be a beggar. He knew the agony of pleading for help that never came. Advantages are hard to handle. They make it difficult for us to know the world's great agony.

What then are we to do with our advantages? Should we feel guilty about them? No, I'm not suggesting that. What good would it do? To wallow in guilt is of no benefit to anyone. But it is important that we be aware of our advantages. Just because we are living more comfortably than someone else does not mean that we are more deserving. It may simply mean that we got a head start. Understand this brothers and sisters, a lot of our advantages have been given to us. Very few of them have we earned. The only real difference between us and those born in Afghanistan is that we were born here and they were born there. Who of us can claim to have earned that?

It is important that we be aware of our advantages, grateful for them and humble about them. But most of all to use them for doing good. The failure of the rich man was that he did nothing to help Lazarus. To change that pattern in our lives will not be easy. In fact, it may be very difficult. Advantages are hard to handle. But rightly understood and sacrificially dedicated, they can be used for the glory of God and the good of those in need.

*Fr. Michael is the pastor of St. James Catholic Church, we have served our morning soupline meal on their parking lot thanks to their generosity. This was Fr. Mike's homily on Sept. 30, 2001.*

# Annual Financial Report for 2001

by Gary Cavalier

We base our salary on Acts (4:34), taking according to our need as the early Christian communities did. We realize that every dollar donated to the Catholic Worker is to help the poor; hence, every dollar we take for our "salary" above what we need is a theft from the poor. Our "salary" is based on room (our home utilities, property tax & fire insurance), board (use of donated food), a small weekly stipend of \$30 each (\$15/week each for our family of four) and the use of the Catholic Worker car.

## Monthly "salary" for Julia & Gary:

Each receives:  
Room (our home costs): \$ 202  
Room (our utility costs): \$ 56  
Stipend (\$30 week): \$ 130  
Monthly "take-home": \$ 388  
Julia and I also have part-time jobs: Julia works for the *From Violence to Wholeness* program of Pace e Bene. This extra income pays for our second car, milk and vegetables, extra home costs, other needs for our boys, etc.

**Thank You  
for your generosity  
in response to our  
Christmas Appeal!**

**PRAY FOR PEACE IN OUR WORLD!** (FOR TAB) **THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!**

**Mark your calendars!  
Empty Bowls Benefit:  
Saturday, April 6**

**A lunch and auction will benefit the Las Vegas Catholic Worker. Each attendee receives a hand-made ceramic bowl. Details in next newsletter and mailings.**

Jan. 1 through Dec. 31, 2001

## INCOME-

Christmas Appeal: \$ 8,459  
Large Donations (\$500+): 16,673  
Monthly Donations: 10,235  
Donations: 8,305  
Empty Bowls event: 8,771  
From IHN for utilities: 2,867  
Other Income: 328  
**TOTAL INCOME: 55,638**

## EXPENSES-

Soupline costs: \$11,299\*  
Food box program: 608\*  
Help to others: 1,849  
1988 Dodge (gas, etc.): 2,014  
Hospitality house costs-  
Utilities: 3,095  
Maintain & Repair: 2,733  
New kitchen floor: 1,291  
Paint for downstairs: 749  
Fire/Liability Insurance: 2,324  
Property tax: 712  
Guest expenses/stipend: 1,970  
Leo the "mouser" cat: 93  
502 w. Van Buren lot: 114  
710 w. Wilson St. lot: 57  
CW family booklets: 370  
15th anniversary event: 1,140  
Newsletter mailing costs: 1,020  
Retreat costs: 649  
Postage & supplies: 1,457  
Salary costs-  
Julia & Gary's house: 4,852  
Julia & Gary utilities: 1,334  
\$15 week stipend for 4: 3,120  
Other expenses: 362  
**TOTAL EXPENSES: 43,212**

**TOTAL INCOME-EXPENSES: 12,426**

Ending Cash on Dec. 31, 2001:  
Cash and Checking: 766  
New Building Fund: 13,771  
Total Cash, Dec. 31: 14,537

Property (purchase cost):  
Hospitality House: 27,355  
502 w Van Buren lot: 12,000  
710 w Wilson St. lot: gift

Empty Bowls Donations: 10,048  
-Empty Bowls Expenses: -1,277  
Empty Bowls Income: 8,771

15th anniversary donations: 1,715  
15th anniversary expenses: -2,855  
15th anniversary costs: 1,140

\*Most (Tons!) of food is donated, we buy bowls, spoons, meat and other supplies.

## PLEASE JOIN US:

**Wednesday-Saturday, 6:00 a.m.:**  
Morning prayer at Catholic Worker.

**Wednesday-Saturday, 6:30 a.m.:**  
Breakfast meal served at St. James Church parking lot (G & McWilliams St.) to the poor and homeless.

**Tuesday, 5:30 p.m.:**  
Mass or Liturgy, potluck following. Call for location.

**Seven Days a Week:**  
Hospitality (IHN) to 3 to 5 homeless families, call 638-8806 to volunteer.

**Last Saturday each month; 8:30 a.m.:**  
Deliver food to homes in need, gather for reflection & prayer, call for info.

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