

Poverty, of course is relative, and the word itself can be used in many different ways: we are all 'poor' before God meaning perhaps that we have nothing to trade with God in order to be like God, that we always stand in need of God, that all is gift. But that's not how we often behave. We may indeed think we know our need of God and seek God in prayer and worship in order to receive God as gift, in order to receive God's gifts, in order to be gifted by God - privileged in some way by God's love. But we can easily abuse this relationship by holding on to those gifts for our own use only and be quite unaware, as is the rich man in today's Gospel story, that we are doing so, blind to the needs of others; so privileged is the rich man indeed that he continues to see Lazarus as a servant figure to be told to do this or that. This blindness to the needs of others, and to our own privileged position, is often a matter of power-play: our richness in whatever respect: be it money, race, education, gender, health, or mental well-being, can corrupt our relations with others, and so with God, because we readily live and act as if privileged by God in ways that others are not and assume that their problem is not being quite like us, not being good enough yet to be privileged by God as we are. Our role thus becomes one of helping them up this ladder of well-being by showing them just what it means to be rich and planting similar aspirations in them – including the idea that this is what good Christians can expect.

*'Lying on ivory beds and sprawling on their divans'*

Or in the words of the black theologian, Barbara A Holmes

*'The price for inclusion in dominant culture is often mimicry or sublimation of self and soul. The rules of engagement in American society include an unspoken litmus test. The closer you come to Eurocentric standards of speech, dress and education, the more acceptable you are.'*  
[p153 Joy Unspeakable]

The point being that in this story of Lazarus and the rich man it's not so much the disparity in wealth that is at issue – though this needs to be addressed or redressed – but the total lack of understanding by the rich man while he was alive that this was an issue at all and the chilling fact that we have political leaders today, including our good Catholic Jacob Rees-Mogg, totally distanced from the reality of what God's love actually demands of us. But I too need to be aware of this power play at work when a poor man comes to the door and the first stance to adopt is not one of presumption, but of listening, a contemplative stance of waiting for not only what the poor man has to say, but of what God has to say through him to me. I'm not very good at this yet, but hoping to get better – before it's too late.

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