

The prophet Amos comes out swinging in today's reading. His country is breaking up into groups that don't care about each other. At their daily feasts the rich, now obscenely rich --- don't drink wine from goblets but guzzle it from bowls. Homes are redecorated with ivory-inlaid furniture. Fortunes are spent on perfumed oils to improve cosmetic appeal and sexual stimulation. While the poor are becoming obscenely desperately poor.

Israel's social fabric, the sense that they are a community in covenant with each other and with God and are in this together and should care about each other, is unraveling.

People have lost what Catholic social teaching calls a sense of the common good; a commitment that everyone should be concerned about the good of the whole community, not just themselves or their group or party. John Paul II calls this a sin against the virtue of solidarity, against the brotherhood and sisterhood of the whole.

Jesus continues in the same vein. His tale of the rich man and Lazarus is not an actual occurrence; it's a parable ... but what a downer. It's an easy one misunderstand.

Notice first: the parable doesn't say being rich is bad, not does it say this particular rich man was a crook and that's why he's in hell. For all we know, the rich man could have been a good honest worker. Nor does the parable say poverty is great and Lazarus was this very good person who came into bad luck. Lazarus might have been a bad person, or perhaps a very lazy person with no one to blame for his suffering but himself.

What the parable laments ... is the lack of solidarity or common feeling between the two. Lazarus had some. He would have eaten the scraps from the rich man's table, and not flipped him off. It is the rich man who had no feeling of communality, no feeling of connection, no concern. He is only interested in a good life for him and his brothers.

The Catholic Catechism says that today respect for the law of human solidarity and charity, based on our common origin, our common human nature, and the common redemption by Jesus on the altar of the cross, is abundantly disregarded. Looking at the world, or this country in particular, that seems like a gross understatement.

Whatever is wrong with us --- I'm thinking of the increasing gap between the wealthy wealthy and the poor poor, or between the liberal liberal and the conservative conservative, or between the Democrat Democrat and the Republican Republican, isn't going to be solved immediately. But we certainly can and must lower our hostility towards one another, our lack of civility in discourse, our lack of charity towards public figures we disagree with, our lack of solidarity.

In any complex issue it is highly unlikely "we" are 100% right, and "they are 100% wrong. We need to act against polarization, oversimplification, making caricatures of different ethnic groups, or immigrants -- legal or non, or homeless, or poor or rich or liberal or conservative. We need to insist on respect for the common humanity of everyone, our solidarity with all, our call to work with each other for the common good. If the rich man had done that with Lazarus,

even a little, he might have ended up right next to Lazarus in heaven, instead of spending his life digging out that horrible abyss.