

Fr. John's Homily for September 25, 2022, the 26th Sunday of Ordinary Time. Complacency
JMJ CHS

It must have been around 1990 that I took my lady friend, Cathy, down to the Fisher Theater to see the new stage play *Les Miserables* (affectionately known as *Les Mis*). It was based on a novel by French author, Victor Hugo, and it was transformed into a musical which was unbelievably popular. It was an incredible story with wonderful acting and songs with inspired lyrics that touched the heart. How many of us sang those songs in the shower, or in the car? Or maybe even in karaoke over the years?

It was the story of the fugitive, Jean Valjean, Fantine, Cosette, Marius and, of course, Inspector Javert, that mean policeman obsessed with chasing him down for a parole violation. The setting was 19th century France. The philosophical anti-God movement, called *The Enlightenment*, had taken its toll on France and the world. The French Revolution was over and the Reign of Terror had come to an end. The guillotine was retired after taking the heads of many Frenchmen, including many priests, bishops, and religious men and women.

Well, when you enjoy something as much as "*LeMis*", you want to share it with others and I decided I wanted to share it with my mom and dad. I got them two tickets as a Christmas present and the deal was that I would drive them down, drop them off, and then come back to pick them up at the end of the play.

So, at the proper time, I came back and waited for them outside the two big bronze doors that were the entrance to the theater. On the inside, all of the actors came out on stage and with the complete orchestra and chorus, were singing that rousing grand finale song called "*Do you hear the people sing?*" Here are some of the words:

*"Will you join in our crusade,
will you be strong and stand with me.
Somewhere beyond the barricade
is there a world you long to see?"*

I imagined my mom and dad in there with tears streaming down their face, overcome with the emotion of the whole thing. But even as I was thinking those very thoughts, I looked down the main hallway of the Fisher and out in the foyer, Standing all alone, was an elderly couple. I said to myself, "No, it can't be". But it was. Ma and Pa Rocus had left the building.

"Mom, dad, what are you doing out here? You're missing the grand finale."

"Well, we were worried that you might not be able to find us so we came out here"

I learned two things that day. Mom and dad were more interested in polka festivals than they were in "the theatah", and secondly, an important life lesson, no two people think alike. We all have different life experiences, perspectives, and philosophies, different understandings of the truth.

And this, of course, is a big dilemma, particularly for those of us who are in pastoral positions. We priests, who are called upon to preach about Jesus and His teachings, which we believe to be the truth. In this relativistic world, how then do we convince others that there is objective truth out there? And to follow Jesus is to be a follower of The One who called himself, *the Way the Truth and the Life*?

In today's Gospel, we have the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. Although unnamed, tradition has given the rich man a name. In Latin the name is *Dives*, which means Rich. The man's name was Mr. Rich. Who knows, maybe his first name was Richard. Richie Rich. And the other person is the poor man named Lazarus. Well, as the story said, Dives, Mr. Rich, dresses up in his fine purple suit and eats sumptuously every day. Lazarus is there outside the man's door, and would have been happy to eat the scraps that fell from Mr. Rich's table.

What is the sin of the rich man? He definitely did not feed the hungry. And he probably did not clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, or visit the sick or imprisoned. But what is the general category of his sin? Well, the answer is in the first sentence of our first reading from the prophet Amos. God is speaking through His prophet and says that His own Chosen People are.....
COMPLACENT!

Now, I always like to check the official definition of a word that I am talking about and so I asked Siri and she said that it is "*an attitude of smugness or uncritical satisfaction at one's achievements*". Well I suppose that's OK but I always thought of complacency as a little bit different. I see it as "lazy indifference". A person who is oblivious to the world around him. Wearing blinders, as it were.

With regard to the rich man, he just sits there, distracted, completely focused inward, thinking about his belly, his wealth, the size of his storage bins, his son's soccer team and his prestige in the synagogue. It could be 1000 different things. He just doesn't notice the man starving outside his door. He is like an ostrich with its head in the sand. He can't see.

Well, we know how the story ends and it's a sad ending. But of course we each have to ask ourselves, "What is in this for me? What is the message for us? *Speak Lord, for your servants are listening. What would you have us do to ensure that on our big day, we will not be accusedof being complacent?*"

Like I said, there are many examples. But I think we need to focus on only one today and we are going to be very specific. Complacency regarding the big decision that lies before the people of Michigan on Tuesday, November 8. The passage, or the defeat of Proposal 3. What is our attitude right now? Do we care? Are we willing to examine the issue? Will we vote? How will we vote? How will we vote on the proposal and on the candidates who are up for election? The battle lines couldn't be more clear this time. We are most definitely in a spiritual battle.

A couple of weeks ago our Bishop, Earl Boyea, asked his priests to read his pastoral letter from the pulpit regarding the proposal. Since that time, oh my goodness, the things that have come out of our Diocese have been remarkable. The MCC, that is, the *Michigan Catholic Conference*,

which represents all the dioceses of the State of Michigan, has addressed this issue in their publication called FOCUS. We will of course provide that to you. There was an early e-mail edition of *Faith Magazine* that did the same. A video was produced featuring Fr. Gordon Reigle of our Diocese as he talks about his inspiration to propose *The 54-day Rosary Novena*. I wish I could say that all of the bishops of Michigan acted in the same way at the same time, but I can't. Our bishop Earl, with encouragement from his staff, overcame any tendency toward complacency and was quite proactive, making what was probably his strongest statement ever. He is insistent that this is an extremely important decision, and we had better get it right. And I agree with him. In fact, I personally think if the citizens of Michigan pass this proposal, we become Sodom and Gomorrah. And we know how things worked out for those two cities.

Back in 1972 it was our national Supreme Court which passed *Roe v. Wade*, the law legalizing abortion. Throughout the years, many fought for a reversal of that unjust decision, and just this year the current Supreme Court did just that. But what that caused was a new movement that would put the decision in the hands of the states. Or more accurately, in the hands of the citizens of the states. And our state of Michigan is one of the first to put the proposal up for a vote and to literally amend our state constitution.

So, my brothers and sisters in Christ, my fellow citizens, my fellow Michiganders, this is where the rubber meets the road. It's now in our hands. And not just in the voting booth on November 8, but now, and in the days to come. What will each of us do to make sure that all Michiganders have a clear sense of what the stakes are? I had my first opportunity to do something like this just last week. Laying on my chiropractors table I asked him if he had heard about proposal 3. He said no. Well now he knows about proposal 3.

Are you familiar with the *Preamble* to our *Michigan State Constitution*? It really is similar to the Preambles of the Constitutions of all of the 50 states of the Union.

This is what it says:

"We, the people of the State of Michigan, grateful to Almighty God for the blessings of freedom, and earnestly desiring to secure these blessings undiminished to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this constitution."

What hypocrisy it would be if proposal 3 passes. What a slap in the face to the God that we say we are grateful to for so many blessings.

And so, to conclude, on behalf of our Bishop Earl, and my brother priests here in the Diocese of Lansing and beyond, let me return to the words of "Les Mis".

"Will you join in our crusade? Will you be strong and stand with us? Because, somewhere beyond the barricade, there is a world we long to see"

Well, if so, then, join in the fight that will give you the right to be free!

+Fr. John