

A Sermon for the First Sunday after Trinity, June 7, 2026

The Epistle, 1 John 4:7-21 - The Gospel, St. Luke 16:19-31

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The first Sunday after Trinity falls within the Octave of Corpus Christi, which we celebrated last Thursday. Corpus Christi means “Body of Christ.” It is a feast that celebrates the Sacrament. Today’s lessons offer a meditation on the connection between Christ’s sacramental body and the church as the Body of Christ. The rich man in the gospel parable was a religious man. He called Abraham “father.” He believed in the God of Israel. However, he ignored the need of Lazarus, who was made in the image of God. The epistle highlights the problem. St. John writes, “He who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.”

The term “Body of Christ” refers to three things. First, it refers to Christ’s ascended and glorified body in heaven. Second, it refers to the Sacrament of Christ’s body. As Jesus said at the Last Supper, “This is my body which is given for you” (Matt. 26:26). Third, it refers to the church. As 1 Corinthians 12:27 says, “You are the body of Christ, and members individually.” All three refer to what is essentially the same thing. Thus, reverence for the presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament must lead to reverence for his presence in the members of his body.

This connection is the background for 1 Corinthians 11:28, which says, “Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup” (1 Cor. 11:28). We tend to hear this as an exhortation to examine our lives for personal sins. However, in 1 Corinthians the passage addresses neglect of poorer members in the Body of Christ.

The early church did not have church buildings. The church usually met in the homes of wealthier members, where there was room to meet. In the home Eucharist in Corinth, some of the wealthier members were gathering early for a celebration from which the poorer members were apparently excluded. As 1 Corinthians 11:21 says, “In eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry and another is drunk.”

The problem was not that church members received the Eucharist while hiding secret sins. Rather, the problem was that members partook of the Sacramental Body of Christ while dishonoring the presence of Christ in their brothers and sisters. As 1 Corinthians 11:28-29 says, “He who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body.” Here, “not discerning the Lord’s body” means not discerning the connection between Christ’s real presence in the Sacrament and Christ’s real presence in his people.

Jesus takes this connection seriously. When the Risen Christ appeared to Saul the Pharisee, when Saul was persecuting the church before his conversion, Christ said to Saul, “Why are you persecuting me?” (Acts 9:4). And in Matthew 25:40, Jesus said he will confront us on Judgment Day with this truth: “Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.”

This connection is easy to understand as a concept but hard to practice, for one reason. The demands of love are never exhausted. They are embedded in the Summary of the Law: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind.” And, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” This is a perpetual command; a way of life. However, we try to fulfill our duty to love in quicker and easier ways. I wrote a check. I gave to the “Go Fund Me.” I gave an hour of my time. I prayed for the person. I fulfilled my duty, right? But tomorrow morning Lazarus will still be laid at our gate. How will we love him again tomorrow?

It is a challenge. That is the point. God is willing to love us each day as difficult and messy as we are. God wants us to wrestle with the challenge of how to love others each day, as difficult and messy as they may be. God knows that Lazarus is not easy to help. Many needy people are well trained in the art of manipulation. Sometimes our generosity is not appreciated or reciprocated. Yet, Lazarus is still laying at our gate. However we work the story, and whatever wisdom we exercise in giving, we cannot ignore him. We must embrace the challenge of love.

One problem we have is that our definition of poverty is almost always monetary. The story tells about a rich man and a poor man. But through the lens of the kingdom of God, things were exactly the opposite of what they appeared to be. The rich man’s wealth was thought to be a blessing, but it ended up being a curse. The poverty of Lazarus was thought to be a curse, but it ended up being his salvation. In terms of the kingdom, the rich man was poor and the poor man was rich.

The role of the gate in the story is worthy of reflection. It was intended to keep evil away from the rich man. Instead, it kept the rich man from God. It cut him off from the needs of the world around him, which would have connected him to God’s presence in the world. The gate that was intended to protect his wealth instead kept him poor.

The rich man’s condemnation was that he ignored God’s presence in a man that was continually in front of him. This suggests that our vocation to love is carried out, not by solving global problems, but by responding to the needs God lays at our gate; by discerning the Lord’s body when we see him at the office, in our own homes, and as we go about the business of life.

We tend to miss the needs around us because we are too busy. This is why genuine love begins with worship. We begin the work of love by ceasing our activity and being with Christ. This is why we begin our time at the altar of God. We begin our time by receiving the gift of love from God in the Bread of Life. Only after we receive the gift of life and love are we able to love—to do the good works God has prepared for us to walk in.

It is a kind of paradox. We must receive love in order to have any love to give. But having received the gift of love from Christ, we must embrace the messy vocation of loving our brothers and sisters. We can express it this way. We receive the life-giving Body of Christ so that we can be life-giving members of the Body of Christ in the world. It is a vocation, a privilege, and a requirement. For, “He who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.”