

# THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

## Sharing The Table

If we had to choose one word from all those which describe our possible relationship to each other, in order to define our relationship with Jesus, what would it be? He has been called our *Lord*, which could be misunderstood (Pharaoh or Genghis Khan); he has been called our *Saviour*, which might limit his meaning to some event in the past when we were in particular danger. He has been defined as our *Brother*, which leaves out his divine life, and as *God*, which leaves out his human life. We can be endlessly creative, and there are whole litanies which embody the results. If you change tack, and ask him to tell us what he is to us, I think you find one dominant, enduring word, which can bear the greater part of what he is to us: the word embodies the legacy he chose for us before he died: he is our *companion*, “one who shares bread with us”. This should make us sensitive to the depth of meaning we share when we break bread together, the sharing of the table.

### Sharing The Rich Man’s Table

When we share the table of the rich, we are taken beyond our own means, to experience a little of the kind of life we cannot afford to live. Sometimes this can be a sublime experience, and sometimes it can be an experience of the hollowness of wealth. You can only eat one dinner, just as you can only sleep in one bed (at a time). If wealth makes the table groan with unwanted food, if quality has been forgotten in the drive for ostentation and quantity, then wealth appears undesirable. It is no substitute for discrimination or justice. Jesus seems to tell us, in today’s famous parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, that what makes a table magnificent is the presence of guests.

### God Has Made Us Rich

In creating this earth, God wanted to bless us with many gifts. There is nothing evil about these riches, nor is it wrong to trade in them for the good of all. There should be plenty for everyone, if the earth is organised according to the will of God. It is when we corner markets, and then hold others to ransom for their last penny, that we begin to infringe the law of God. We go yet further when we corral the poor into oppressive circles of dependence, like debt, or their impossible needs for technology or medicine, and keep them poor so that we always hold a whip hand in any deal. The ultimate abuse is when

we’ve permanently excluded the poor from sharing the gifts of the earth, or from approaching us in our safe abundance. This is what the rich man in the parable has achieved. He feasts every day on the inside of his wall, and Lazarus starves and rots every day outside the gate.

### Jesus, Our Companion

But we sit down every day to share the bread of Jesus. Where does his table stand? You could mount the marble pavements of a great cathedral, passing through the cloudy splendours of Baroque adornment, or setting your eyes on the beetling vistas of great lantern-towers; but you would not, in these magnificent places, come closer to the table of Jesus than in the humblest shoe-box of a church (name no names). *Where two are gathered* (no need, in our parable, for more) *I am there in the midst of them*. If only the Rich Man had gathered poor Lazarus, his table would have been blessed, and his bread would have been broken *with Jesus in their midst*. As it was, two lived in loneliness, and died apart from one another; and the table of Jesus was not laid *inside* the walls. It was the *outsider* who came to be “comforted in the arms of Abraham”.

### Christ Respects Our Barriers

It seems clear that Christ does not ignore the walls we build around our wealth. When he says *There is a great gulf fixed* between the eternal Lazarus and the eternal Rich Man, he seems to say that God will respect the decisions we make within our lives, and they will endure in our eternal dimension. The gulf is the one we chose on earth: surprisingly, I recall his words to Peter: *what you bind on earth shall be considered bound in heaven*. But he has already warned us who will inherit the Kingdom. Dear as we are to him, he will not, where we divide ourselves from his beloved poor, hesitate about where to break his bread. We, who are so frequently at his altar on earth, must take note of this forecast of the guest-list in eternity.

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