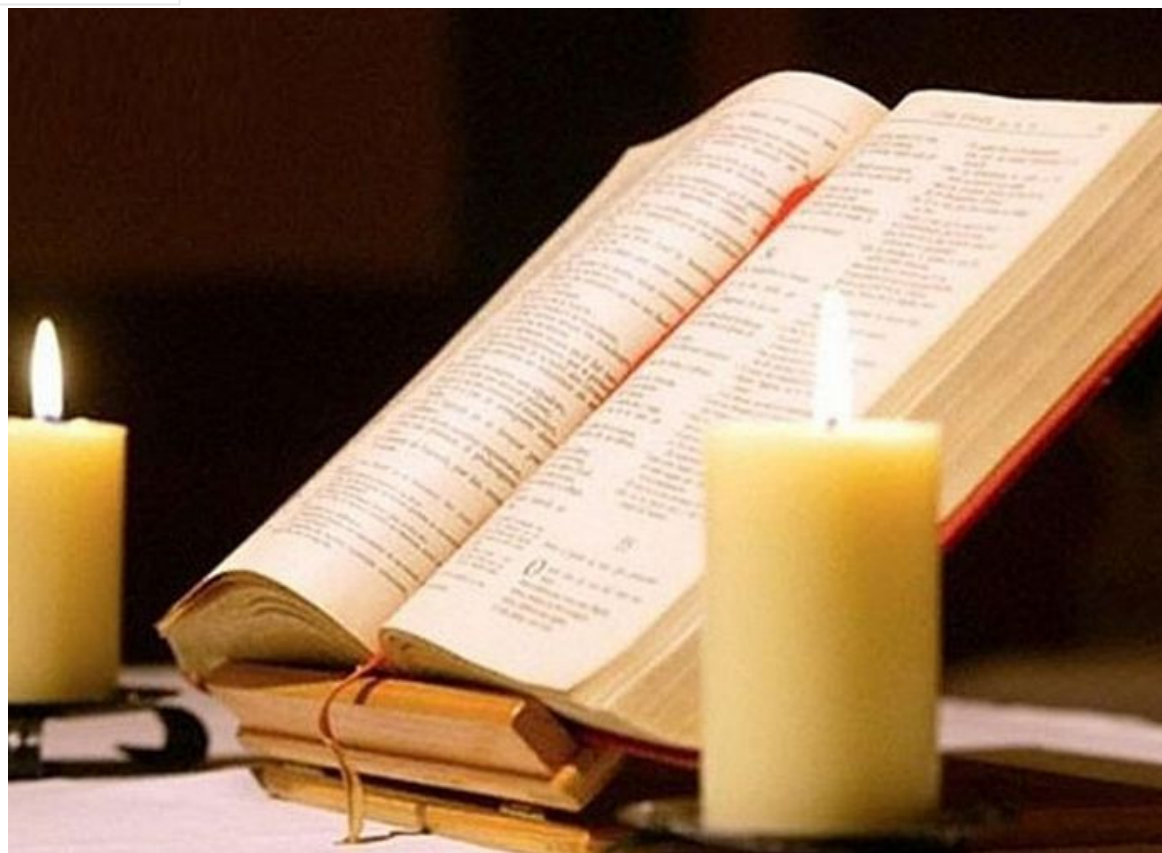


GOSPEL PEARLS

Identity and meaning of life

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Jesus said to the Pharisees: "There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger

in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.' But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.' And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house— for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.' But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' And he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'” (Luke 16: 19-31)

God has given us free will, that is, the power to choose between good and evil, while trusting Him and seeking to obey His commandments. When seeking evil, we allow our own will to prevail even against what is true. The anonymous rich man, who during his earthly life seems not to notice Lazarus, has actually lost his identity and meaning of life. In fact, identity and the meaning of life can be given to us only through deep communion with God and with our neighbour. In eternity, Lazarus cannot help the rich man because the latter's lack of charity has produced an abyss that can no longer be filled. Let us take advantage of Lent not to neglect charity towards our neighbour.