

The Nineteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time
(Year C)

<i>First Reading</i>	Wisdom 18:6-9
<i>Response</i>	Blessed the people the Lord has chosen to be his own.
<i>Psalm</i>	Psalm 33:1, 12, 18-19, 20-22
<i>Second Reading</i>	Hebrews 11:1-2, 8-19
<i>Gospel Acclamation</i>	Stay awake and be ready! For you do not know on what day your Lord will come.
<i>Gospel</i>	Luke 12:32-48

The 19th Sunday in Ordinary Time for Year B continues our journey through the Gospel of Luke 12, and here we're continuing to look at some of Jesus' teachings on wealth and almsgiving, as well as some of his teachings on being ready for the 2nd coming, or the *parousia* is the Greek word for the coming of Jesus at the time of the final judgment. Now that might seem like a strange pairing but I hope you'll see why these go together by the time we're finished this video. So let's start with Luke 12:32 and we're going to go all the way down to verse 48 for today's gospel. This is what it says:

“Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms; provide yourselves with purses that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

“Let your loins be girded and your lamps burning, and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the marriage feast, so that they may open to him at once when he comes and knocks. Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes; truly, I say to you, he will gird himself and have them sit at table, and he will come and serve them. If he comes in the second watch, or in the third, and finds them so, blessed are those servants! But know this, that if the householder had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would have been awake

and would not have left his house to be broken into. You also must be ready; for the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”

Then it continues, verse 41:

Peter said, “Lord, are you telling this parable for us or for all?” And the Lord said, “Who then is the faithful and wise steward, whom his master will set over his household, to give them their portion of food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master when he comes will find so doing. Truly, I tell you, he will set him over all his possessions. But if that servant says to himself, ‘My master is delayed in coming,’ and begins to beat the menservants and the maidservants, and to eat and drink and get drunk, the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, and will punish him, and put him with the unfaithful. And that servant who knew his master’s will, but did not make ready or act according to his will, shall receive a severe beating. But he who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, shall receive a light beating. Every one to whom much is given, of him will much be required; and of him to whom men commit much they will demand the more.¹

Alright, so stop there. This is a long gospel; there’s a lot going on here. So I’ll do my best to kind of walk through it piece by piece and highlight some elements. First, number one, the opening line: “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom...” This I just would at least want to highlight for you, this saying is only found in the Gospel of Luke. It reflects things we see in the Gospel of John, Jesus’ image of himself as a good shepherd and his disciples as a flock, but in this case it seems to be drawing on the image of a remnant in the Old Testament. Because notice, he doesn’t just say “fear not, flock,” but “fear not” what? “little flock.” There’s an image in the prophets, over and over again, that in the future age of salvation it will only be a portion, or a remnant of Israel that will be righteous and obedient to God. And so when Jesus takes this image of a little flock, he’s basically identifying his disciples as the righteous remnant of Israel in the last days. And you even see that just by the fact that he chooses 12 of the disciples to be the leaders of this group. They are representatives of a kind of

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible citations/quotations herein are from *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*. New York: National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, 1994.

new Israel. And he's telling them don't be afraid, it's your Father's will to give you the kingdom of God." That's the first point.

The second topic dealt with in the gospel has to do with almsgiving. And it's fascinating here. Jesus tells his disciples, "Sell your possessions, and give alms", and in doing that you're going to provide for yourselves purses that don't wear out and treasure in the heavens that doesn't get eaten by the moths or stolen by thieves. Now, what's he talking about, "sell your possessions and give alms"? Now this is really fascinating. The Greek word for alms is *eleēmosynē*. It is a long word, *eleēmosynē*, but it comes from the Greek word *eleos*, which means mercy. And you already know this from the Mass. Because in the Mass, what do we say? *Kyrie eleison*. You hear the similarity? *Eleos* is the noun mercy. *Kyrie eleison* means "Lord, have mercy." So although the word gets translated into English as alms, which is kind of an archaic word, it's based on the Greek word for mercy. So to give to the poor, to give alms, *eleēmosynē*, is an act of *eleos*, an act of mercy. So literally what Jesus is saying is sell your possessions and do mercy, or give mercy, meaning giving alms to the poor. And when you do that, you're going to make for yourself a purse, which is what people carry their money around in, that never goes old. Think of a wallet that never goes old, you've had a wallet for fifty years; that is what you have, it is an eternal wallet carrying your wealth. And then think of a treasury in the heavens where no one can ever steal from it.

And again, in our day and time, we will often put our money in the bank and we kind of feel like it's secure, nothing's going to happen to it. But in Antiquity, your treasury was only as good as the safety of your own home. If someone broke into your home, they could take everything you possessed if they found your treasury, if they found your storage chest of whatever wealth you might happen to have. So what Jesus is saying is put your treasury not on earth but in Heaven, because where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. And it is interesting here, the Greek word here for treasure is *thēsauros*. We get the word *thesaurus* from that. What is a thesaurus? It's a treasury of words. Most people don't think about it that way, but that's really what it is. It's a treasure house, a store, a treasure chest, so to speak, of various words. So Jesus is saying, your thesaurus of spiritual wealth, your treasure chest, shouldn't be in your bedroom or buried beneath your home or beneath the tree in your yard, it should be in the heavens where no thief can steal from it and no moth can ever consume it. Notice there the image of clothing as wealth as well, that moths consume clothing. So he's exhorting his apostles to sell their posses-

sions and to give alms to the poor. That's the second theme dealt with in this gospel today.

After doing this (giving them this exhortation on almsgiving), Jesus now moves directly into 2 parables about the final judgment, or about his second coming, or about the coming of the son of man. And you might think, well what do those have to do with each other? I'm going to come back to that in just a minute. For now, let's just walk through each one of the parables. The first one is the parable of the Return of the Master. So here he's trying to exhort his disciples to be awake and to be prepared for the coming of the son of man at the final judgment. And in order to do that he uses this parable of servants who are awake, waiting for their master to return from a wedding feast. So he says to his disciples, "let your loins be girded and your lamps burning and be like servants who are waiting for their master to come home from a wedding feast." So what does Jesus mean "let your loins be girded and your lamps be burning"? These are just two images of being prepared. So if a person was about to travel, they would not let their undergarment (their undercloak) hang loose. They would gird it up so that they could walk, travel or run more easily. So an image of being prepared to travel would be to have your loins girded. And then of course, your lamp burning, this is an image of the servant keeping the lamp lit so that when the master comes home in the dark he can see his way. We still say this today, you know, "leave the light on for me". So these are both images of preparedness, but in this case Jesus is comparing the coming of the son of man at the final judgment to the return of a master from a wedding feast.

And I've probably talked about this in other videos before, but ancient Jewish wedding feasts were very elaborate productions. They were normally seven days long. And then one of the main celebrations, the night of the consummation of the bridegroom and the bride, would take place when the groom and the bride (especially the bride) would be carried in procession to the groom's house into a *huppah*, or a bride chamber, and there they would consummate the marriage on the wedding night. So they were, in other words, celebrations that could go late into the night. So the image here is that the master is coming back from a wedding feast and his servants are waiting at his home, ready for him. So Jesus pronounces a beatitude on the servants who are ready for the master when he returns. "Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes..." But notice here (I've said this before in other videos), there's almost always a twist to Jesus' parables. There's something unexpected. We'll here's the twist, he says when the master comes and finds them awake, "Amen, I say to you, he will gird himself and

have them sit at the table and he will come and serve them.” Now this never would happen in an ancient setting, that the master would gird himself with a towel. This is an image of foot washing, like in the Gospel of John; Jesus girds himself with a towel and then he washes the feet of his disciples. That was a task of a slave to their master. So when the master would come home, the slave would have their loins girt, they’d be girded with a towel (that’s how you knew who the slave was, the person wearing a towel), and then they’d use the towel in a basin of water to wash the feet of the master.

But here Jesus is saying, if you are awake when the master comes home, he will take a towel, gird himself, and wash your feet and set you a table and act as if you’re the master and he is the servant. So there’s the twist to this very mysterious parable. He gives this beatitude of those servants who will stay up even to the 2nd, 3rd or 4th watch. So in the ancient world they didn’t have clocks, so the night was divided into various watches of the night. So you have the 1st watch, the 2nd watch, the 3rd watch. These are basically like 3 hour periods of dividing up the night into different portions. So each servant would take a post, so to speak, at the different watches of the night. And so Jesus is commending those servants who stay awake throughout the night waiting for the master to come home, and how they would be rewarded. Now (pause there), that’s the level of the parable. Obviously he’s talking about the coming of the son of man. So it’s interesting here that the image he uses is a wedding feast and sitting at table, the master serving them at table. These are both interesting because elsewhere Jesus will compare the kingdom of God itself to a wedding banquet, the celebration of the union of a bridegroom and his bride. So this plays into a theme we’ll see elsewhere in the gospels, that the kingdom of Heaven isn’t just eternal life, it’s an everlasting wedding feast where the divine bridegroom is united to his bride. But the other dimension of that is that here Jesus compares this coming of the master to a banquet, although it’s a banquet in which the master will act as if he is the servant and the servants will sit at table and he will serve them and feed them.

Well this is a Eucharistic image when you really get down to it because what Jesus is describing here (in the parable) is what he’s going to do at the last supper, when he’s going to take the bread and wine in the last supper and say that this is his body offered for the disciples. So I just bring this up not because it’s the primary meaning, but it’s a kind of secondary connotation. The primary meaning is that you need to be ready for the coming of the son of man and the coming of the kingdom of God like servants who are ready for their master to return. But there are echoes

also of Jesus' identity as the bridegroom, of the kingdom as a wedding feast and even of the imagery of the Eucharistic table of the Lord as a place where the Lord acts as a servant and offer's himself to his own disciples. That's the first parable.

The second parable shift's slightly, now it's a parable of a Thief in the Night. It has the same basic meaning, it has the same upshot, be ready for the son of man when he comes. But here, instead of comparing the son of man to a master returning from a wedding feast, he does another twist. Now the son of man is like a thief who comes in the middle of the night to break into your home. Now those are two kinds of readiness. He says, "know this, that if the householder had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would have been awake and would not have left his house to be broken into." Think about this. There's a certain kind of expectation and anticipation that you might have as servant if you're waiting for your master to return. It's very different if someone calls you and says "tonight, I know that your house is going to be broken into." Are you going to be able to sleep that night or are you going to stay awake? Well, you're not even going to be able to rest. There's going to be a certain level of anxiety about the unknown hour of the thief's arrival. So Jesus here uses both these parables, the master's return from the wedding and the thief in the night to talk about the importance of being ready for the coming of the son of man, but also the fact that you don't know exactly when he's going to come. This is going to be a standard theme in all of Jesus' preaching. Whenever he talks about the final judgment and the second coming, its crucial to emphasize that he always tells the disciples, you don't know when it's going to happen. There's a certain ignorance about the timing of the end.

And we see this elsewhere in the gospels of Matthew and Mark, Jesus says (you know), "Neither the angels in Heaven, nor the Son but only the Father know the day and the hour when Heaven and earth are going to pass away." So this "ignorance of the end", it's just important because every now and then (well actually pretty frequently), people will rise up and they'll set a timeline. The final judgment, it's going to happen at this time on this day. This is a very famous example, this is from the 1980's. It was a book that came out, *88 reasons the world will end in 1988*. And of course when 1988 came and nothing happened, the next year, another book came out, *89 reasons the world will end in 1989*. As you might imagine, the 2nd edition did not sell as well as the first (which sold millions of copies) because of the fact that the deadline that was given, the timeline that was given, didn't actually happen. So here we see Jesus affirming that the son of man is coming, but at the same time telling you, at an hour you do not expect. So the thief in the night

gives a powerful image of the unexpected nature of the son of man's coming. So Jesus' disciples, their responsibility, their duty, is just to be ready and to stay awake; to be vigilant, to keep alert.

And then good old Peter, once Jesus gives this parable (well really it's kind of two parables, of the master and the thief), Peter says "Lord, are you telling this parable for us or for everyone?" So Peter wants to know, "Wait. Does this apply to us or who's this parable addressed to?" And it's fascinating here that Jesus responds with a question (if you ask Jesus a question, you can basically bank on the fact that he's going to respond with a question. And if you know anyone who does this, it can be a little annoying. If you ask a question and they respond with a question and they ask a question, professors like to do this kind of thing). Anyway, it's a good teaching method though because it helps a person, it leads them into the truth you want them to be lead to, but in an active way. So when Peter asks the question, Jesus says "Well, who then is the faithful and wise steward whom his master will set over his household to give them their portion of food at the proper time?" Now, pause there. He's going to go into a parable here about servants who are ready for their master and do what servants are supposed to do, and servants who aren't, but I can't help but notice here that he's responding to Peter with the story of a steward who is set over the master's household and put in charge of all of his possessions.

The reason I bring that up is that in the Gospel of Matthew 16, when Jesus gives Peter the keys of the kingdom and says "whatever you bind is bound in Heaven and whatever you loose is loosed in Heaven", it's an allusion to Isaiah 22, where Eli'akim is made the chief steward over the house of King David. In the Old Testament, there was this figure called the *al bayith*, literally the "over the house." Sometimes he's called the prime minister, but chief steward would be a better translation. So the chief steward in the Old Testament was 2nd only to the king and he had the authority of the king to bind and loose and he held the keys of the kingdom. That's how you knew who the chief steward was. Well it's fascinating that Peter, in Matthew 16, is being described as the chief steward of the kingdom of God. Jesus gives him the keys of the kingdom. In Luke, it's interesting here in chapter 12 when Peter says "hey, are you telling this parable for us?" Jesus says, "Well who is the faithful steward whom the master sets over his household?" It's the exact same expression there, the over the house in the Old Testament with regards to the kingdom was the chief steward of King David. Now Jesus is talking about a parable of a chief steward of the master's household, which is basically the

role that Peter's going to take as chief of the 12 apostles. He's 2nd in rank only to Jesus himself. That's just a little side note, but it's kind of interesting there.

In any case, it leads into a parable in which Jesus gives another Beatitude: "Blessed is that servant whom his master when he comes will find so doing. Truly, I tell you, he will set him over all his possessions. But if that servant says to himself, 'My master is delayed in coming,' and begins to beat the menservants and the maidservants, and to eat and drink and get drunk, the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know." The RSV says "will punish him, and put him with the unfaithful", but literally it says, "will cut him in two" or "cut him in pieces", "will dismember him and put him with the unfaithful", the *apistōn*, the unbelievers, the unfaithful. Ok, so press pause there. So what Jesus is doing in this parable is he's going to give four different outcomes, four different fates for four different kinds of servants. I want you to pay close attention to what these four servants are. The first one is the servant who does what his master wills him to do and who is ready for his return. That servant will be set over all the master's possessions. That is the first servant. The second one is the one who says "my master is delayed" and begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink and get drunk. What happens to that servant? He gets cut in two and put with the unfaithful.

Now if you press pause right there, one more time, these are clearly images of entering into the kingdom of God or being cast out of the kingdom into the punishment of *Gehenna*, right? We'll see this elsewhere in the gospels, right? "Enter into the glory of the kingdom," that's what Jesus is describing here. If you are being set over all his possessions, he's entering into the master's household, the master's kingdom. But if this is a parable, and it's an allegory for the kingdom of God, then the good servant is rewarded by being elevated in the kingdom. "He who humbles himself in will be exalted" and then the wicked servant goes to *Gehenna*, or goes to Hell, experiences punishment and put with the unfaithful. Think here about other places where Jesus says "they'll be cast into the outer darkness where there's weeping and gnashing of teeth." Here the servant is cast among the unfaithful. Now if this parable were written by a later Christian in the Protestant tradition, who only believed those were the two fates possible, it should've stopped there, but there are two other outcomes that Jesus gives us in this parable and it's really fascinating. There's a third servant, it's the servant who knew his master's will but didn't prepare or act according to his will. Ok, so in other words, this servant isn't ready for his master to come, but unlike the wicked servant he doesn't start abusing

other people. He's not getting drunk, he's not beating his fellow manservants and maidservants. He's just not as ready as he should be. He's not ready for the master's return. So what's his punishment? It doesn't say that he's cut in two or put with the unfaithful. It says that he receives a severe beating. And then the fourth servant is a different one. This is the one who didn't know his master's will, but did what deserved the beating. That person shall receive a light beating. So this servant is what later moral theologians would call "invincibly ignorant." In other words, they didn't know what the master's commands were for whatever reason, and they did not prepare, they did what deserved the beating like the third servant, but they were less culpable because they didn't know what they were supposed to do. They received a light beating.

Now it should be pointed out that this image of a master beating his servants is obviously going to be repugnant, especially for modern day readers, but in antiquity, servants and slaves would have been part of the ancient landscape. So Jesus is using what people know, earthly realities, to illustrate what they don't understand, which is the kingdom of God, eternal realities. So if the first blessed servant is the image of being rewarded in Heaven, the second wicked servant is an image of being punished forever in Hell, then what are these other two servants who received either a severe beating or a light beating? Well, I'll let you figure that out. No, no, I won't let you figure it out. I'll answer it for you. This is obviously an image of eschatological punishment. It is a beating, so there's a punishment involved, but it's temporary, not permanent, because the second servant, how is he punished? By being cut in two. Now, apart from modern medical methods, that was a permanent condition in antiquity. If someone cut you in two, you would remain cut in two; it's an image of death. But the beating means that it is finite, temporary punishment. This image will go on to lay a foundation in Jesus' own teaching for the later church doctrine that comes to be known as Purgatory. The idea that after death at our judgment, there are some people whose sins will not be so grave that they're cast in the outer darkness of Gehenna, but yet at the same time their deeds are not so righteous that they would enter immediately into the glory of the kingdom, but that they must be purified and experience the temporal punishment for venial sin that their sins require (that justice requires) before they can be purified and enter into the kingdom of Heaven. Well that's the last two servants in the parable, right?

This punishment of Purgatory can be severe for some people who knew what was wrong and did it anyway. This is why deliberate venial sin is, by the way, not something to play around with. Sometimes Catholics make it light, "Oh, venial

sin.” No, no, no, deliberate venial sin is not something to play around with. Then there’s venial sin in which the person is unaware that it’s even wrong and I’m sure you can probably think of examples of that as well. Those sins still have consequences, the servant in the parable still is punished, but it’s a lighter punishment; literally “light” is the word venial, that’s what venial mean. It’s a lighter punishment than those that knew what was wrong and did it anyway. So sometimes, you know, people would say “Dr. Pitre, where’s the doctrine of Purgatory in the Bible?” There’s lots of different places you can point to, you can point to 2nd Maccabees 12, where they’re praying for the dead; you can point to Paul, 1st Corinthians 3, about being “saved through fire”; but what people often don’t do is actually point to Jesus in the gospels. Jesus’ parable here in Luke 12 gives us one of the clearest, scriptural foundations for the fact that Heaven and Hell are not the only eschatological options when it comes to judgment. There’s also a third area (third realm) which is a temporary punishment for sin that doesn’t exclude one ultimately from the kingdom, but has to be undergone before you can enter into the joy of the master’s household. There’s Purgatory, right there, in the Gospel of Luke. Is the word Purgatory there? No, no, no. But is the reality there? Yes. Ok, alright, we’re done. Alright, that’s the gospel.

Thankfully, the Old Testament reading for today is quite short, since the gospel is so long. It’s one of the times when we read from the Wisdom of Solomon, which is only in the Catholic Old Testament. And it’s a little harder to see the reasoning for this passage, but I’ll try to make it clear. It’s Wisdom 18:6-9. It says this:

That night was made known beforehand to our fathers, so that they might rejoice in sure knowledge of the oaths in which they trusted. The deliverance of the righteous and the destruction of their enemies were expected by thy people. For by the same means by which thou didst punish our enemies thou didst call us to thyself and glorify us. For in secret the holy children of good men offered sacrifices, and with one accord agreed to the divine law...

Ok, pause. What is that talking about? Well this is just a kind of poetic summary description of the Passover Night in the book of Exodus. If you remember in the book of Exodus 12, when the Israelites were released from Egypt by the 10th of the plagues, it was the Passover plague, the death of the firstborn son that finally set them free from Egypt. And God warned them in advance about what night that would take place (that plague would take place) and he also told them how to pre-

pare to be delivered from death. If they wanted to be saved from the destroying angel, they had to offer the sacrifice of the Passover Lamb and then put the blood of the lamb on the door post and the lentils of their home as a sign to the destroyer to pass over their homes as it went about destroying the firstborn sons of Egypt. So what does that have to do with the gospel for today? Well it's real simple. It's simple if you're a 1st century Jew because in 1st century Judaism, there was this idea that when the Messiah came back, he would come on Passover night. So Jesus, when he gives the Apostles their instructions on being ready for the coming of the son of man (when he tells them to gird up their loins and keep their lamps burning), those are echoes of Passover night, because in the Old Testament God actually tells the people, "Eat the Passover lamb standing and with your loins girded, so you can be ready to depart from Egypt when the Passover takes place (when the moment comes for you to be set free)." So in other words, Passover night, Passover sacrifices, those are echoes that (kind of) lie behind Jesus' teaching, and both the Old Testament and the New Testament reading here are about being ready for the deliverance and the salvation that God is going to bring.

And that's what the responsorial psalm is for today, Psalm 33. The refrain is about waiting for the Lord and in it it says that those who wait for the Lord, the Lord will "Deliver their soul from death." That is in verse 19. In other words, just like the Israelites were delivered from death because they trusted in the Lord, they offered the sacrifices he required and they were prepared for his coming (when he told them in advance), so too the disciples of Jesus will be ready for the 2nd coming if they put their trust in the Lord, stay awake and be ready and "offer sacrifices"? What is that referring to? Well you could talk about the sacrifice of the Eucharist, but in closing here, I'd actually like to bring it back around to the topic we opened with, because in context you'll notice that Luke pairs parables about being ready for the second coming with Jesus' teachings on almsgiving. You might think, "Well how did those two go together?" Well it's interesting, they go together because in ancient Judaism (and in the Old Testament itself), giving to the poor was seen as a kind of sacrifice. Like when we think of sacrifice, we pretty much exclusively think of animal sacrifice. We think of blood sacrifice. And it's true, animals were offered on the altar. If you know a little bit more, you might also think of bread and wine being sacrificed in the Old Testament. In other words, *unbloody* sacrifices. And it's true, those too were offered on the altar. But you know what we almost never think about is giving to the poor, in other words giving alms, as also being a kind of sacrifice that not only cared for the poor, but actually was seen as atoning for sin and delivering you from death.

Now in closing, I'm just going to give you a couple of parallels. If you want to read more about this, I would encourage you to check out Gary Anderson's book called *Charity: The Place of the Poor in the Biblical Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 54-55. It is a brilliant book, amazing book on this, on the role of almsgiving in the Bible, Old and New Testaments, and in Christian Tradition, and in particular, how almsgiving was seen as a sacrificial act. I'm just going to show it to you from the Bible and Tradition with a few key quotes here that are on my outline:

Store up almsgiving in your treasury,
and it will rescue you from all affliction (Sirach 29:12)

Give alms from your possessions... Do not turn your face away from any poor man, and the face of God will not be turned away from you. If you have many possessions, make your gift from them in proportion; if few, do not be afraid to give according to the little you have. *So you will be laying up a good treasure for yourself against the day of necessity.* For charity delivers from death and keeps you from entering the darkness; and for all who practice it charity is an excellent offering in the presence of the Most High. (Tobit 4:7-11)

So notice, almsgiving here doesn't just deliver you from death, it doesn't just lay out treasure for yourself against the day of judgment, it also is an offering in the presence of God. In other words, it's a sacrifice acceptable to God. It has atoning power. And you might be thinking, "alright Dr. Pitre, that's in the Catholic Old Testament. I mean that might be Tobit, it might be in Sirach. I don't regard..." maybe you don't regard those books as canonical. Maybe you're not Catholic yourself. Well, how about the words of Jesus? Luke 11:41:

Give for alms those things which are within; and behold, everything is clean for you. (Luke 11:41)

Notice this, Jesus connects almsgiving with the power of cleansing. Well, cleansing what? The cleansing from sin. So this imagery of almsgiving having the power to cleanse is something that goes back to Old Testament. The idea that giving charity to the poor atones for our sins. This is standard fair in the Old Testament and one of the teachings of Jesus. Now with that all in mind then, I'll close with why is that important for Luke 12?" Well, it's real simple. It gives us a concrete meaning to what Jesus says when he says "build up your treasure in Heaven." How do I build

up my treasure in Heaven? According to the Bible, according to Sirach and the book of Tobit, the way I build up treasure in Heaven is to give away my treasure on earth. How can I be prepared for the son of man's coming? Here's a thought, start giving to the poor, like yesterday. Don't be like the rich fool, but give your possessions away. And if you need an inspiration for this, I'll close with this quote from St. John Chrysostom (golden mouth), a 4th Century Church Father, archbishop, bishop of Constantinople. In this passage, John Chrysostom is just assuming that of course, all Christians know that giving alms is an act of sacrifice. Well he says something interesting. He says if that's true, then the poor person is like an altar upon which the sacrifice of alms is offered to God. Listen to what John Chrysostom says:

You [he is speaking to his Christian audience] honor this altar [meaning the altar of the Eucharist in the sanctuary] indeed, because it receives Christ's body [at the Eucharist]. But the poor man, who is himself the body of Christ, you treat with scorn, and when perishing, neglect. You can see this altar [meaning the altar of the poor] lying around everywhere, both in streets and in market places, and you can sacrifice upon it every hour; for on this too is sacrifice performed.²

So in closing then, what John is saying here is he's taking the teaching of the Old Testament and the teaching of Jesus and saying, if you really want to build up your treasure in Heaven, if you want to pay down the debts of your sins, so to speak, then start offering the sacrifice of alms upon the altar of a poor person. In other words, when you give alms to a poor person, don't just see it as like an act of benevolence on your part, see it as a liturgical act. Recognize in the poor the mystical body of Jesus Christ. And if Jesus' body really is what the New Testament says, the Temple of God, then every person, every poor person to whom you give alms is kind of like a living altar, a living representative of Christ. So every act of almsgiving becomes an acceptable sacrifice to the Lord. It's a beautiful mystagogical way of understanding what's really happening when we give to the poor. I mean after all, it was Jesus himself who said "if you did it to one of these, the least of my brethren, you did it to me."

² John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 2 Corinthians* 20; trans. Gary A. Anderson, *Charity*, p. 15; cf. *NPNF1* 12.374