

26th Sunday (C)

28th September 2025

‘Steps to take to avoid hell’

Amos 6: *The revelry of those who now stretch themselves out shall pass away*

Ps 145: *The Lord raises up those who are bowed down*

1Tim 6: *Keep the commandment until the appearing of Our Lord*

Lk 16: 19–31: Dives & Lazarus

St Luke has all sorts of parables of Jesus that none of the other Gospels has recorded. Many of Our Lord’s parables are repeated across the Gospels Matthew, Mark & Luke — they share a lot of material. But Luke has some dramatic and distinctive features, and some of the parables that are the most famous illustrations of Jesus’s divine teaching are only found in Luke: ‘the Good Samaritan’ (Lk 10); ‘the Prodigal Son’ (Lk 15); ‘the Dishonest Steward’ (Lk 16, last Sunday); ‘the Unjust Judge & the Widow’ and ‘the Pharisee & the Tax Collector’ (Lk 18). Another is today’s striking parable, ‘Dives & Lazarus’ or ‘the Rich Man & the Poor Man’ (Lk 16), a real assault on our sensibilities: the reality of hell and the ways to live life and avoid hell!

What does the Rich Man get so wrong in life? I’m sure that if questioned he’d have said, “I’m a good man! I didn’t do anyone any harm!” Maybe so, maybe that’s what he thinks, but, sorry to say, he has neglected the neighbour at his very front door; perhaps, worse, he has not even

noticed him, caught up with his busy, luxurious life. What was he doing, that he didn’t notice the needs of starving Lazarus? I think I know — if you’ll permit me a little modern updating ... I think *he had his head buried in his mobile phone!* There he was, every day, at his banquet table, as he came out of his front door, even as he *stepped over* the poor man lying in the gateway, glued to his phone, airpods in, oblivious to the world. But, he avers, “doing harm to no one.” Mmmm ... but doing no good, either.

So I want, today, at the very outset of this academic year, to go through a few things that, starting now, 1st week of the 1st term, will help us live life well, and avoid the hell of neglecting God and our neighbour. How great it is, that you are here at Mass today, students wanting to hear and live the Gospel; well, if that is so, and we want to ‘build our life’s house on rock,’ then we need to “hear the word of God, and keep it!” What can help us do that, to be good, active, on-fire Christian students, putting Jesus first?

1. **Phones.** Well, maybe, first, as I said, put your phones down! I mean this quite seriously. What would be

worse than, when asked one day, “What did you do in your university days?” you can only honestly answer: “I spent 3(4) yrs scrolling on my phone.” Of course we all know the unavoidable necessity of using one’s phone for all sorts of useful things, but I really think that we must become masters of our phone usage and not let it master us. How easy it is to waste vast amounts of time ‘doom scrolling’ on so-called smartphones. Not smart at all. The Lord didn’t give us our brain, our talents, our intelligence, our university years, our life, in order to waste 4 or 5 hrs a day (or night) on our phone watching video clips, surfing the internet, trawling social media. I think it’s a spiritual essential to get on top of our phone usage, and to live for the Lord, and not for our phone. Many of us will struggle with this, but a decision at the start of this new academic year to deal with this problem, will make for a much more blessed year. So: use internet filters to rigorously screen out any immoral websites. If possible, if you have more than one room (e.g. if you live at home or in a bigger

property than a 1-room student bedsit) don’t take your phone into your bedroom at night — leave it somewhere else, so you aren’t tempted to waste precious sleep-time on your phone. Don’t *over-use* ChatGPT or other AI; please don’t rely on ChatGPT as your imaginary friend, therapist, or counsellor. There are real people around you: lecturers, support staff, chaplains, friends, fellow students — these are your go-to when you need to talk to someone. Don’t ask a Large Language Machine (a fancy computer) to answer your life’s problems ... it will just reiterate whatever it’s been trained to say, which is often garbage, and at times is even dangerous, and has no rootedness in God or the human spirit. Use an app to limit your phone-use time, where you set a max. time per day of phone usage. Use whatever technical means you have, to get on top of this. It’s a problem for many, and we need to conquer our phone addictions in order to see the world properly, and not to go around head-in-the clouds, missing real life, and real people, and real interactions

with God's beautiful creation which speaks to the soul.

2. **Music.** As a corollary of making firm, spiritual decisions about our phones, and as part of our commitment to living a godly life, I think we also need to edit the playlist of music we might be inviting into our souls through our earphones. I remember some time last year taking a little look at the pop-song lyrics of a few in-vogue singers. I couldn't believe how much really foul language they used, and sexually explicit lyrics too, including elements glamorizing violence and abuse, verging on the demonic. These are not words and ideas that can innocently be taken into our heart via our music listening, however boppy the melody or beat; no, they corrupt us. To permit immoral ideas such entry into our souls is dangerous to our moral life; so I urge you, if this applies to you, to take a hard look at your listening, and without delay to cut out of your playlist any singer that uses crude or foul language, or any form of sexual innuendo or explicit lyrics. For a Christian there is no other decent choice; we need to steer well

clear of corrupting influences, and to make a choice for clean and wholesome listening. We do this for Christ, and with His blessing, to be pure for Him.

3. **Silence, stop, & pray.** Unlike the Rich Man, lost in his own thoughts and selfish world, his 'castle of the ego,' we need to open ourselves up to the divine, if we are truly to live as human beings as God intended. When we've put down our phones and take off our earphones, what are we left with? We are left with, hopefully, some silence to be with our thoughts and with God, in other words, with prayer. Take time in these university years, and helped by the life of this Chaplaincy, your devout fellow students, and your chaplains, to learn to pray more regularly and more deeply. There's nothing more precious each day to anchor your life in the reality of who you are before God — a beloved son or daughter of Him, fearfully and wonderfully made — than to take time to pray in the quiet of His holy presence, whether that's in your room, or even better in this, or another local, Catholic chapel, where the living

presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament resides. We have ample opportunities here and in CathSocs on campus to enter into prayer: Sunday Mass, daily Mass, Adoration of Jesus in the Eucharist, Holy Hrs, prayer groups.

4. **Please read a real book.** Another benefit of putting your phone down, is that you can read a book! You may laugh, as you have come to “read for” a degree (in old-fashioned language). Research reported recently showed that about 60% of 16–24yr-olds either have never read systematically, or have given up on reading regularly, e.g. a book cover-to-cover. I know that many of your course resources now will be online, but please don’t let your whole degree go by without reading anything! One of the joys of my university years was that, whilst studying physics, I had an English-degree friend who re-ignited my interest in reading novels. More importantly for us, this morning, is the reading of *Scripture*. Please, read Scripture. Slowly, lovingly, carefully, prayerfully. Preferably from a *Bible*, rather

than your phone ... or, as we know, a notification will come in... and that’s that! Do make sure, however many, or few, books you have on your shelf, that it does at least contain a Bible. Sitting quietly with a passage of Scripture, even just a few verses for 15mins, is a real connection with God, whose Word “cuts more finely than any double-edged sword.” *Feel free to take away your Mass sheet after Sunday Mass!* This is always fine! Re-visit those sacred words at some point later in the week in a moment of quiet and prayer.

5. **Keep Sunday special.** Yes, please keep the Lord’s Day holy. Maybe this is something that you have got out of the habit of. Maybe it’s something that your family hasn’t ever really lived, but I urge upon you the proper sanctification of Sunday, not just with Sunday Mass, but with the avoidance of work and mundane tasks. My parents banned me from doing homework on Sundays, so as not to ruin our family Sunday, and this is something I carried over to university years, avoiding study on Sunday. Instead, I would keep Saturday as a

working day, getting done then what I needed to be on top of for the weekend, and then I could give Sunday over to the Lord and to friends and to the pleasures of recreation. Here in London, doing your degree, why don't you do the same, for the sake of your sanity and sanctity? Don't get sucked into making Sunday just another day; it's not — it's the Lord's Day, and the Church expects us to keep it special. Why not have a nice lunch at NH, spend leisure time with friends, go for a walk, play football, explore the city, take a train trip somewhere, come to evening Adoration?

6. **Don't neglect your needy neighbour.** The Rich Man stepped over his needy brother lying at his feet, ignoring him, or just not noticing him. We must not do the same, especially as we all live in such proximity to the street homeless on Tottenham Ct Rd. So, another call on our spiritual life is to care for the poor who surround us. It can be a complex question, the varying reasons for begging and rough sleeping — but to act on the call of Christ to do some work of charity or

volunteering is another important dimension of responding faithfully to the Gospel. In just 2 Sundays' time we'll have our *NH Volunteering Fair*, when you can choose a good cause from amongst the stall-holders present to offer a bit of your time. This will include, for example, caring for the poor and homeless through projects based at St James's, St Patrick's, and Notre Dame de France parishes locally, and our own Newman House SVP Soup Run. Details for these and many other charities will be available on 12th Oct after morning Mass. Do not neglect your brother or sister in need! How more direct could Jesus be, than in this parable today? We are duty-bound to do good. We must feed the starving man at our doorstep, not just avoid treading on him as we go on our merry way!

We are those who do hear the words of that “someone who has risen from the dead,” who calls us, young people, to be *hearers of His Word, and doers of the Word*. We can make these university years sanctified, a *holy training* in Christian life. We *can make the choices now* that avoid hell.