Robert Frost, the well-known New England poet, has written a poem called, “Mending Wall.” In it, Robert describes the annual task of mending the stone wall fence that separates his property from his neighbor’s land.

While each works together on his own side, replacing the stones that have fallen during the winter, Robert wonders why they even have a fence. His neighbor keeps on working and then replies, “Good fences make good neighbors.”

“Yes, but why do fences make good neighbors,” Robert continues to ask. “Isn’t it because people have cows? But here, there are no cows.” Then, he makes the observation, “Before I build a wall, I’d ask to know, what I was walling in, or walling out.”

The poem ends by Robert saying, “There is something that doesn’t love a wall, that wants it down.” According to an ancient proverb, “Two people in friendship are stronger than any walls of stone.”

That may be true; yet many people find comfort and a sense of security in walls. They prefer having fences that protect them and keep out those who are different; those people whom they don’t understand, those who seem to challenge their own belief systems, those who are the Lazarus of their own time and place.

And so, we tend to continue to build barriers that will keep ‘them’ far away from us, as if we could catch their poverty or as if their pain and want would contaminate our own safe little worlds.

But, in the Gospels, Jesus comes to tear down the walls that divide us, the walls between rich and poor, between black and white, between man and woman, between young and old. Jesus comes to transform a world divided by race and nationality, divided by religion and politics, divided by fears and hatreds as old as the mountains and as deep as the oceans.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus tells the story about a very rich man and a very poor man names Lazarus. The dividing wall between them is symbolized by the rich man’s gate, behind which Lazarus lies, daily begging for the crumbs that fall from his table.

The rich man is not really a bad person, but a self-centered complacent one. It was not his wealth that kept him from Abraham’s side, but his faithless stewardship of what he had. He could have done a great deal for the poor around him; yet he was uncaring and unresponsive to the plight of one poor beggar at his gate.

Lazarus was simply invisible to him. Why? Because the rich man lives in his own little, narrow, social cocoon. He lives in a gated community. He socializes only with his wealthy friends. He only talks to his equals and dines with his close companions. He lives life with a sense of entitlement.

He deserves everything he has; after all, he worked hard for it. And Lazarus, he thinks to himself, deserves his poverty. It is his state in life. Some people are lucky, and many others are not. That’s life, and nothing can change it.

What is the lesson for us in today's parable? I think Jesus is asking us two basic questions. (1) Are there any gates, walls, fences, or barriers in your life keeping you away from the poor, the homeless, the needy, the abandoned, the forgotten? (2) Are there any Lazaruses who may be lying at the door of your home begging for help? If so, what can you do about it?

Long, long ago, God the Father had a conversation with God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. It was decided that God the Son would come in human flesh and walk among us. This Jesus would one day proclaim in John's Gospel that He is the gate and whoever comes and goes through Him would have everlasting life.

Only when we are willing to replace our gates of division with Jesus, the gate of life, can we become a safe place, a home, where all are welcome.

Perhaps, this prayer could help us learn the lesson of today's parable: "O God, open our eyes to see the poor, the needy, the forgotten at our own gates, and open our hearts to welcome them into our lives with compassion and respect. In welcoming the Lazarus to our tables, may we welcome you. In giving to them, may we give you thanks for the privilege of giving and sharing what you, in your goodness, have entrusted to us. Amen!"