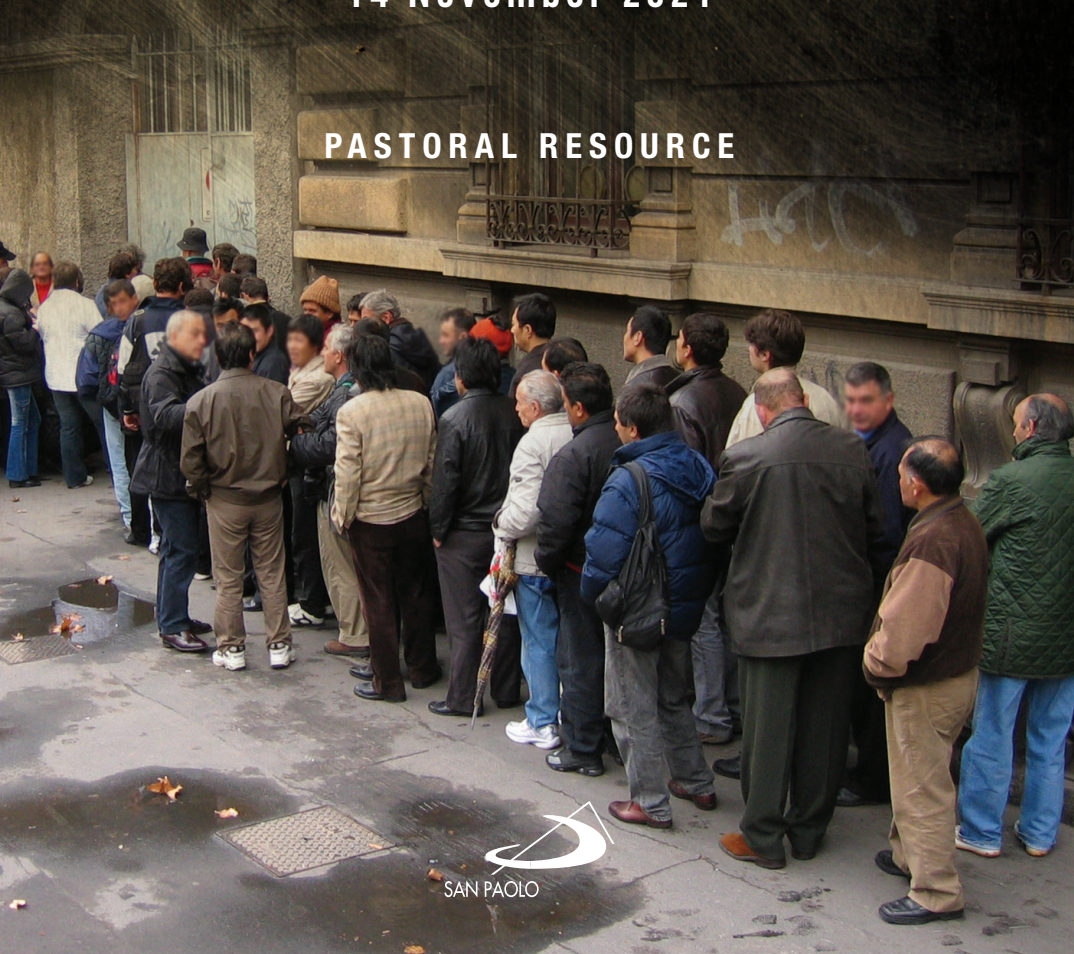


PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE PROMOTION
OF THE NEW EVANGELIZATION

THE POOR YOU WILL ALWAYS HAVE WITH YOU

Fifth World Day of the Poor
14 November 2021

PASTORAL RESOURCE



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FIFTH WORLD DAY OF THE POOR 2021

THE POOR YOU WILL ALWAYS HAVE WITH YOU

Presentation

This is the fifth *World Day of the Poor*. Although not a lot, it is enough to make an initial appraisal. In November 2016, when Pope Francis lifted his eyes from the official text of his homily and saw the thousands of poor people who filled St. Peter's Basilica to celebrate their *Jubilee of Mercy*, he announced that from that moment on the Church would have its *World Day of the Poor*; few anticipated the effect that this would generate.

There was a reason and purpose for wanting this day to be entrusted to the Dicastery for the New Evangelization. In fact, Francis wanted to directly confirm what he had written as the program of his pontificate: «This is why I want a Church which is poor and for the poor. They have much to teach us. Not only do they share in the *sensus fidei*, but in their difficulties they know the suffering Christ. We need to let ourselves be evangelized by them. The new evangelization is an invitation to acknowledge the saving power at work in their lives and to put them at the centre of the Church's pilgrim way. We are called to find Christ in them, to lend our voice to their causes, but also to be their friends, to listen to them, to speak for them and to embrace the mysterious wisdom which God wishes to share with us through them» (EG 198).

Starting from here, each year the theme for the Day has been inspired by the Word of God. “Let us love, not with words, but with deeds” (cfr. 1Jn 3:18) in 2017, “This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him” (Ps 34:6) in 2018, “The hope of the poor shall not perish forever” (Ps 9:19) in 2019, “Stretch forth your hand to the poor” (Sir 7:32) in 2020. As can be seen, in the first three years the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity were at the center of the reflection, now a new process is beginning that will focus on the new situations of poverty.

“The poor you will always have with you” (Mk 14:7). Jesus' words were explained in Pope Francis' Message which was made public, as has become customary, on the feast day of St. Anthony of Padua. Furthermore, the theme is confirmed in this Pastoral Resource Book, prepared for the people of God, so that the *World Day* may be a permanent call for our communities to be attentive and welcoming to those who come to our door. As we know, what Jesus said on the eve of his passion was a rebuke to his disciples for having criticized the woman who had poured a very expensive ointment on him. In this way he made himself the interpreter and representative of all the poor by receiving due attention for his sufferings. «The most vulnerable of their people lack basic necessities. The long lines in front of soup kitchens are a tangible

sign of this deterioration». In this way, Pope Francis describes the poverties that are before our eyes every day so that no one can turn their gaze away and avoid taking on the necessary responsibilities. Having the poor with us at all times should not create discomfort, but rather arouse a due sense of justice and Christian solidarity. These are an indispensable prelude if the celebration of the Eucharist is to be a real sharing of the Body and Blood of Christ and support the living witness of Christians as a form of credibility of the faith.

✠ Rino Fisichella

*President of the Pontifical Council
for Promoting the New Evangelization*



The poor you will



MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS FOR THE FIFTH WORLD DAY OF THE POOR

XXXIII Sunday in Ordinary Time
14 November 2021

«THE POOR YOU WILL ALWAYS HAVE WITH YOU»
(*Mk 14:7*)

1. “The poor you will always have with you” (Mk 14:7). Jesus spoke these words at a meal in Bethany, in the home of a certain Simon, known as the leper, a few days before Passover. As the Evangelist recounts, a woman came in with an alabaster flask full of precious ointment and poured it over Jesus’ head. This caused great amazement and gave rise to two different interpretations.

The first was indignation on the part of some of those present, including the disciples, who, considering the value of the ointment – about 300 denarii, equivalent to the annual salary of a labourer – thought it should have been sold and the proceeds given to the poor. In Saint John’s Gospel, Judas takes this position: “Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?” Saint John goes on to note that Judas “said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and as he had the money box, he used to take what was put in it” (12:5-6). It was no accident that this

harsh criticism came from the mouth of the traitor: it shows those who do not respect the poor betray Jesus' teaching and cannot be his disciples. Origen has strong words in this regard: "Judas appeared to be concerned about the poor... If in our own day some hold the purse of the Church and, like Judas, speak out for the poor, but then take out what they put in, let them share in the lot of Judas" (*Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* 11:9).

The second interpretation was that of Jesus, and it makes us appreciate the profound meaning of the woman's act. He says, "Let her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me" (Mk 14:6). Jesus knows that his death is approaching, and he sees in her act an anticipation of the anointing of his lifeless body prior to its placement in the tomb. This was beyond anything the others present could imagine. Jesus was reminding them that he is the first of the poor, the poorest of the poor, because he represents all of them. It was also for the sake of the poor, the lonely, the marginalized and the victims of discrimination, that the Son of God accepted the woman's gesture. With a woman's sensitivity, she alone understood what the Lord was thinking. That nameless woman, meant perhaps to represent all those women who down the centuries would be silenced and suffer violence, thus became the first of those women who were significantly present at the supreme moments of Christ's life: his crucifixion, death, burial and resurrection. Women, so often discriminated against and excluded from positions of responsibility, are seen in the Gospels to play a leading role in the history of revelation. Jesus' then goes on to associate that woman with the great mission of evangelization: "Amen, I say to you, wherever the Gospel is proclaimed to the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her" (Mk 14:9).

2. This powerful "empathy" established between Jesus and the woman, and his own interpretation of her anointing as opposed to the scandalized view of Judas and others, can lead to a fruitful reflection on the inseparable link between Jesus, the poor and the proclamation of the Gospel.

The face of God revealed by Jesus is that of a Father concerned for and

close to the poor. In everything, Jesus teaches that poverty is not the result of fate, but a concrete sign pointing to his presence among us. We do not find him when and where we want, but see him in the lives of the poor, in their sufferings and needs, in the often inhuman conditions in which they are forced to live. As I never tire of repeating, the poor are true evangelizers, for they were the first to be evangelized and called to share in the Lord's joy and his kingdom (cf. Mt 5:3).

The *poor*, always and everywhere, *evangelize us*, because they enable us to discover in new ways the true face of the Father. "They have much to teach us. Besides participating in the *sensus fidei*, they know the suffering Christ through their own sufferings. It is necessary that we all let ourselves be evangelized by them. The new evangelization is an invitation to recognize the salvific power of their lives and to place them at the center of the Church's journey. We are called to discover Christ in them, to lend them our voice in their causes, but also to be their friends, to listen to them, to understand them and to welcome the mysterious wisdom that God wants to communicate to us through them. Our commitment does not consist exclusively of activities or programs of promotion and assistance; what the Holy Spirit mobilizes is not an unruly activism, but above all an attentiveness that considers the other in a certain sense as one with ourselves. This loving attentiveness is the beginning of a true concern for their person which inspires me effectively to seek their good" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 198-199).

3. Jesus not only sides with the poor; he also shares their lot. This is a powerful lesson for his disciples in every age. This is the meaning of his observation that "the poor you will always have with you". The poor will always be with us, yet that should not make us indifferent, but summon us instead to a mutual sharing of life that does not allow proxies. The poor are not people "outside" our communities, but brothers and sisters whose sufferings we should share, in an effort to alleviate their difficulties and marginalization, restore their lost dignity and ensure their necessary social inclusion. On the other hand, as we know, acts of charity presuppose a giver and a receiver,

whereas mutual sharing generates fraternity. Almsgiving is occasional; mutual sharing, on the other hand, is enduring. The former risks gratifying those who perform it and can prove demeaning for those who receive it; the latter strengthens solidarity and lays the necessary foundations for achieving justice. In short, believers, when they want to see Jesus in person and touch him with their hands, know where to turn. The poor are a sacrament of Christ; they represent his person and point to him.

Many are the examples of saints who made mutual sharing with the poor their life project. I think, among others, of Father Damien de Veuster, the saintly apostle to the lepers. With great generosity, he answered the call to go to the island of Molokai, which had become a ghetto accessible only to lepers, to live and die with them. He rolled up his sleeves and did everything he could to improve the lives of those who were poor, ill and outcast. He became both doctor and nurse, heedless of the risks involved, and brought the light of love to that “colony of death”, as the island was then called. He himself contracted leprosy, which became the sign of his total sharing in the lot of the brothers and sisters for whom he had given his life. His testimony is most timely in our own days, marked by the coronavirus pandemic. The grace of God is surely at work in the hearts of all those who, without fanfare, spend themselves for the poorest, sharing with them in concrete ways.

4. We need, then, wholeheartedly to follow the Lord’s invitation to “repent and believe in the Gospel” (Mk 1:15). This conversion consists primarily in opening our hearts to recognizing the many different forms of poverty and manifesting the Kingdom of God through a lifestyle consistent with the faith we profess. Often the poor are viewed as persons apart, as a “category” in need of specific charitable services. Yet following Jesus entails changing this way of thinking and embracing the challenge of mutual sharing and involvement. Christian discipleship entails deciding not to accumulate earthly treasures, which give the illusion of a security that is actually fragile and fleeting. It requires a willingness to be set free from all that holds us back from achieving true happiness and bliss, in order to recognize what is lasting, what

cannot be destroyed by anyone or anything (cf. Mt 6:19-20).

Here too, Jesus' teaching goes against the grain, for it promises what can only be seen and experienced with complete certainty by the eyes of faith. "Everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands for my name's sake will receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life" (Mt 19:29). Unless we choose to become poor in passing riches, worldly power and vanity, we will never be able to give our lives in love; we will live a fragmented existence, full of good intentions but ineffective for transforming the world. We need, therefore, to open ourselves decisively to the grace of Christ, which can make us witnesses of his boundless charity and restore credibility to our presence in the world.

5. Christ's Gospel summons us to display special concern for the poor and to recognize the varied and excessive forms of moral and social disorder that are generating ever new forms of poverty. There seems to be a growing notion that the poor are not only responsible for their condition, but that they represent an intolerable burden for an economic system focused on the interests of a few privileged groups. A market that ignores ethical principles, or picks and chooses from among them, creates inhumane conditions for people already in precarious situations. We are now seeing the creation of new traps of poverty and exclusion, set by unscrupulous economic and financial actors lacking in a humanitarian sense and in social responsibility.

Last year we experienced yet another scourge that multiplied the numbers of the poor: the pandemic, which continues to affect millions of people and, even when it does not bring suffering and death, is nonetheless a portent of poverty. The poor have increased disproportionately and, tragically, they will continue to do so in the coming months. Some countries are suffering extremely severe consequences from the pandemic, so that the most vulnerable of their people lack basic necessities. The long lines in front of soup kitchens are a tangible sign of this deterioration. There is a clear need to find the most suitable means of combating the virus at the global level without promoting

partisan interests. It is especially urgent to offer concrete responses to those who are unemployed, whose numbers include many fathers, mothers, and young people. Social solidarity and the generosity which many, thanks be to God, have shown are, together with far-sighted projects of human promotion, making a most important contribution at this juncture.

6. Nonetheless, one question, which is by no means obvious, remains. How can we give a tangible response to the millions of the poor who frequently encounter only indifference, if not resentment? What path of justice must be followed so that social inequalities can be overcome and human dignity, so often trampled upon, can be restored? Individualistic lifestyles are complicit in generating poverty, and often saddle the poor with responsibility for their condition. Yet poverty is not the result of fate; it is the result of selfishness. It is critical, therefore, to generate development processes in which the abilities of all are valued, so that complementarity of skills and diversity of roles can lead to a common resource of mutual participation. There are many forms of poverty among the “rich” that might be relieved by the wealth of the “poor”, if only they could meet and get to know each other! None are so poor that they cannot give something of themselves in mutual exchange. The poor cannot be only those who receive; they must be put in a position to give, because they know well how to respond with generosity. How many examples of sharing are before our eyes! The poor often teach us about solidarity and sharing. True, they may be people who lack some things, often many things, including the bare necessities, yet they do not lack everything, for they retain the dignity of God’s children that nothing and no one can take away from them.

7. For this reason, a different approach to poverty is required. This is a challenge that governments and world institutions need to take up with a farsighted social model capable of countering the new forms of poverty that are now sweeping the world and will decisively affect coming decades. If the poor are marginalized, as if they were to blame for their condition, then the very concept of democracy is jeopardized and every social policy will prove

bankrupt. With great humility, we should confess that we are often incompetent when it comes to the poor. We talk about them in the abstract; we stop at statistics and we think we can move people's hearts by filming a documentary. Poverty, on the contrary, should motivate us to creative planning, aimed at increasing the freedom needed to live a life of fulfilment according to the abilities of each person. It is an illusion, which we should reject, to think that freedom comes about and grows through the possession of money. Serving the poor effectively moves us into action and makes it possible to find the most suitable ways of raising and promoting this part of humanity that all too often is anonymous and voiceless, but which has imprinted on it the face of the Saviour who asks for our help.

8. "The poor you will always have with you" (Mk 14:7). This is a summons never to lose sight of every opportunity to do good. Behind it, we can glimpse the ancient biblical command: "If one of your brothers and sisters... is in need, you shall not harden your heart nor close your hand to them in their need. Instead, you shall open your hand to them and freely lend them enough to meet their need... When you give to them, give freely and not with ill will; for the Lord, your God, will bless you for this in all your works and undertakings. For the needy will never be lacking in the land..." (Deut 15:7-8, 10-11). In a similar vein, the Apostle Paul urged the Christians of his communities to come to the aid of the poor of the first community of Jerusalem and to do so "without sadness or compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor 9:7). It is not a question of easing our conscience by giving alms, but of opposing the culture of indifference and injustice we have created with regard to the poor.

In this context, we do well to recall the words of Saint John Chrysostom: "Those who are generous should not ask for an account of the poor's conduct, but only improve their condition of poverty and satisfy their need. The poor have only one plea: their poverty and the condition of need in which they find themselves. Do not ask anything else of them; but even if they are the most wicked persons in the world, if they lack the necessary nourishment, let us

free them from hunger. ... The merciful are like a harbour for those in need: the harbour welcomes and frees from danger all those who are shipwrecked; whether they are evildoers, good persons, or whatever they may be, the harbour shelters them within its inlet. You, too, therefore, when you see on land a man or a woman who has suffered the shipwreck of poverty, do not judge, do not ask for an account of their conduct, but deliver them from their misfortune” (*Discourses on the Poor Man Lazarus*, II, 5).

9. It is crucial that we grow in our awareness of the needs of the poor, which are always changing, as are their living conditions. Today, in fact, in the more economically developed areas of the world, people are less willing than in the past to confront poverty. The state of relative affluence to which we have become accustomed makes it more difficult to accept sacrifices and deprivation. People are ready to do anything rather than to be deprived of the fruits of easy gain. As a result, they fall into forms of resentment, spasmodic nervousness and demands that lead to fear, anxiety and, in some cases, violence. This is no way to build our future; those attitudes are themselves forms of poverty which we cannot disregard. We need to be open to reading the signs of the times that ask us to find new ways of being evangelizers in the contemporary world. Immediate assistance in responding to the needs of the poor must not prevent us from showing foresight in implementing new signs of Christian love and charity as a response to the new forms of poverty experienced by humanity today.

It is my hope that the celebration of the *World Day of the Poor*, now in its fifth year, will grow in our local Churches and inspire a movement of evangelization that meets the poor personally wherever they may be. We cannot wait for the poor to knock on our door; we need urgently to reach them in their homes, in hospitals and nursing homes, on the streets and in the dark corners where they sometimes hide, in shelters and reception centers. It is important to understand how they feel, what they are experiencing and what their hearts desire. Let us make our own the heartfelt plea of Father Primo Mazzolari: “I beg you not to ask me if there are poor people, who they are

and how many of them there are, because I fear that those questions represent a distraction or a pretext for avoiding a clear appeal to our consciences and our hearts... I have never counted the poor, because they cannot be counted: the poor are to be embraced, not counted" (*Adesso* n. 7 – 15 April 1949). The poor are present in our midst. How evangelical it would be if we could say with all truth: we too are poor, because only in this way will we truly be able to recognize them, to make them part of our lives and an instrument of our salvation.

*Rome, Saint John Lateran, 13 June 2021
Memorial of Saint Anthony of Padua*

Francesco





HOMILY

OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

Holy Mass Vatican Basilica
Fourth World Day of the Poor
XXXIII Sunday of Ordinary Time
15 November 2020

The parable we have just listened to has a beginning, a middle and an end, which shed light on the beginning, the middle and the end of our lives.

The beginning. Everything begins with a great good. The master does not keep his wealth to himself, but gives it to his servants; five talents to one, two to another, one to a third, “to each according to his ability” (Mt 25:15). It has been calculated that a single talent was equivalent to the income of some twenty years’ work: it was of enormous value, and would be sufficient for a lifetime. This is the beginning. For us too, everything began with the grace of God – everything always begins with grace, not with our own efforts – with the grace of God, who is a Father and has given us so many good things, entrusting different talents to each of us. We possess a great wealth that depends not on what we possess but on what we are: the life we have received, the good within us, the indelible beauty God has given us by making us in his image... All these things make each of us precious in his eyes, each one of us is priceless and unique in history! This is how God looks at us, how God feels towards us.

We need to remember this. All too often, when we look at our lives, we see only the things we lack, and we complain about what we lack. We then yield to the temptation to say: “If only...!” If only I had that job, if only I had that home, if only I had money and success, if only I didn’t have this or that problem, if only I had better people around me...! But those illusory words – if only! – prevent us from seeing the good all around us. They make us forget the talents we possess. You may not have that, but you do have this, and the “if

only” makes us forget this. Yet God gave those talents to us because he knows each of us and he knows our abilities. He trusts us, despite our weaknesses. God even trusts the servant who will hide his talent, hoping that despite his fears, he too will put to good use what he received. In a word, the Lord asks us to make the most of the present moment, not yearning for the past, but waiting industriously for his return. How ugly is that nostalgia, which is like a black mood poisoning our soul and making us always look backwards, always at others, but never at our own hands or at the opportunities for work that the Lord has given us, never at our own situation... not even at our own poverty.

This brings us to the center of the parable: the work of the servants, which is service. Service is our work too; it makes our talents bear fruit and it gives meaning to our lives. Those who do not live to serve, serve for little in this life. We must repeat this, and repeat it often: those who do not live to serve, serve for little in this life. We should reflect on this: those who do not live to serve, serve for little in this life. But what kind of service are we speaking of? In the Gospel, good servants are those who take risks. They are not fearful and overcautious, they do not cling to what they possess, but put it to good use. For if goodness is not invested, it is lost, and the grandeur of our lives is not measured by how much we save but by the fruit we bear. How many people spend their lives simply accumulating possessions, concerned only about the good life and not the good they can do. Yet how empty is a life centered on our needs and blind to the needs of others! The reason we have gifts is so that we can be gifts for others. And here, brothers and sisters, we should ask ourselves the question: do I only follow my own needs, or am I able to look to the needs of others, to whoever is in need? Are my hands open, or are they closed?

It is significant that fully four times those servants who invested their talents, who took a risk, are called “faithful” (vv. 21, 23). For the Gospel, faithfulness is never risk-free. “But, father, does being a Christian mean taking risks?” – “Yes, dearly beloved, take a risk. If you do not take risks, you will end up like the third [servant]: burying your abilities, your spiritual and material riches, everything”. Taking risks: there is no faithfulness without risk. Fidelity

to God means handing over our life, letting our carefully laid plans be disrupted by our need to serve. “But I have my plans, and if I have to serve...”. Let your plans be upset, go and serve. It is sad when Christians play a defensive game, content only to observe rules and obey commandments. Those “moderate” Christians who never go beyond boundaries, never, because they are afraid of risk. And those, allow me this image, those who take care of themselves to avoid risk begin in their lives a process of mummification of their souls, and they end up as mummies. Following rules is not enough; fidelity to Jesus is not just about not making mistakes, this is quite wrong. That is what the lazy servant in the parable thought: for lack of initiative and creativity, he yielded to needless fear and buried the talent he had received. The master actually calls him “wicked” (v. 26). And yet he did nothing wrong! But he did nothing good either. He preferred to sin by omission rather than to risk making a mistake. He was not faithful to God, who spends freely, and he made his offence even worse by returning the gift he had received. “You gave me this, and I give it to you”, nothing more. The Lord, for his part, asks us to be generous, to conquer fear with the courage of love, to overcome the passivity that becomes complicity. Today, in these times of uncertainty, in these times of instability, let us not waste our lives thinking only of ourselves, indifferent to others, or deluding ourselves into thinking: “peace and security!” (1 Thess 5:3). Saint Paul invites us to look reality in the face and to avoid the infection of indifference.

How then do we serve, as God would have us serve? The master tells the faithless servant: “You ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest” (v. 27). Who are the “bankers” who can provide us with long-term interest? They are the poor. Do not forget: the poor are at the heart of the Gospel; we cannot understand the Gospel without the poor. The poor are like Jesus himself, who, though rich, emptied himself, made himself poor, even taking sin upon himself: the worst kind of poverty. The poor guarantee us an eternal income. Even now they help us become rich in love. For the worst kind of poverty needing to be combatted is our poverty of love. The worst kind of poverty needing to be combatted is our poverty of love. The Book of Proverbs praises

the woman who is rich in love, whose value is greater than that of pearls. We are told to imitate that woman who “opens her hand to the poor” (Prov 31:20): that is the great richness of this woman. Hold out your hand to the poor, instead of demanding what you lack. In this way, you will multiply the talents you have received.

The season of Christmas is approaching, the holiday season. How often do we hear people ask: “What can I buy? What more can I have? I must go shopping”. Let us use different words: “What can I give to others?”, in order to be like Jesus, who gave of himself and was born in the manger”.

We now come to the end of the parable. Some will be wealthy, while others, who had plenty and wasted their lives, will be poor (cf. v. 29). At the end of our lives, then, the truth will be revealed. The pretense of this world will fade, with its notion that success, power and money give life meaning, whereas love – the love we have given – will be revealed as true riches. Those things will fall, yet love will emerge. A great Father of the Church wrote: “As for this life, when death comes and the theatre is deserted, when all remove their masks of wealth or of poverty and depart hence, judged only by their works, they will be seen for what they are: some truly rich, others poor” (SAINT JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *Homilies on the Poor Man Lazarus*, II, 3). If we do not want to live life poorly, let us ask for the grace to see Jesus in the poor, to serve Jesus in the poor.

I would like to thank all those faithful servants of God who quietly live in this way, serving others. I think, for example, of Father Roberto Malgesini. This priest was not interested in theories; he simply saw Jesus in the poor and found meaning in life in serving them. He dried their tears with his gentleness, in the name of God who consoles. The beginning of his day was prayer, to receive God’s gifts; the center of his day was charity, to make the love he had received bear fruit; the end was his clear witness to the Gospel. This man realized that he had to stretch out his hand to all those poor people he met daily, for he saw Jesus in each of them. Brothers and sisters, let us ask for the grace to be Christians not in word, but indeed. To bear fruit, as Jesus desires. May this truly be so.



LECTIO DIVINA

First Proposal

«THE POOR YOU WILL ALWAYS
HAVE WITH YOU»

(Mk 14:7)

LECTIO

Mk 14:1-11

«It was two days before the Passover and the festival of Unleavened Bread. The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him; for they said, "Not during the festival, or there may be a riot among the people." While he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head. But some were there who said to one another in anger, "Why was the ointment wasted in this way? For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor." And they scolded her.

But Jesus said, "Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me. She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her." Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them. When they heard it, they were greatly pleased, and promised to give him money. So, he began to look for an opportunity to betray him».

«For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me».

In order to interpret the puzzling words of Jesus in Mk 14:7, it is crucial to read it in the context of the semiotic whole in which it is placed, that is, the account of the passion and death of Jesus (Mk 14:1-15:47), an account that plays such a predominant role in the gospels that it has been given the famous definition of "accounts of the passion of Jesus preceded by an exten-

sive introduction”.

The saying of Mk 14:7 is at the very beginning of the account of the passion narrative, in the section of Mk 14:1-11, in which the evangelist parallels the preparation for the Passover to two opposing worlds, that of Jesus and that of Satan, that of light and that of darkness: «It was two days before the Passover and the festival of Unleavened Bread. The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to arrest Jesus (imperfect conative and iterative: (express words, encounters, multiple and persistent maneuvers to kill the Messiah-Son before the Passover) by stealth and kill him; for they said, “Not during the festival, or there may be a riot among the people» (Mk 14:1-2).

This is the preparation for the Passover by the domain of darkness, by those who have decided to reject the Messiah-Son and of soldiers under the banner of the prince of darkness.

Immediately afterwards, in synopsis, Mark describes the Paschal preparation of Jesus and his disciples: «While he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head» (Mk 14:3).

Belonging to one side or the other is by no means acquired once and for all; it is always subject anew to the dramatic choice of human freedom. In fact, one of the Twelve, Judas Iscariot, manifests his rejection of Jesus with senseless words, which is a prelude to his betrayal. «But some (among which, in the light of Jn 12: 4-5, it is very probably Judas Iscariot) said to one another in anger “Why was the ointment wasted in this way? For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor.” And they scolded (without speaking openly but with looks and murmurs) her» (Mk 14: 4-5).

It is in the face of the willful blindness about the meaning of the woman's gesture that Jesus interjects the saying that is at the center of this meditation: «Then Jesus said, “Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me» (Mk 14:6-7).

It is impossible to overestimate the importance of Jesus' statement considering the following: «Then (káí) Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve went (the aorist *apélthen* indicates first of all the free and voluntary withdrawal from Jesus and the group of the Twelve and then the equally free adhesion to Jesus' enemies; the Vulgate is very precise: "abiit ad summos sacerdotes") to the chief priests in order to betray him to them. When they heard it, they were greatly pleased, and promised to give him money. So he began to look for an opportunity to betray him» (Mk 14:10-11).

The *káí* of Mk 14:10 does not let us categorically affirm a direct causal link between what happened and Judas' final decision to betray him. However, the possibility, according to the post hoc propter hoc axiom, must not be excluded at all. This is what Venerable Saint Bede believes: «*Infelix Judas damnus quod ex effusione unguenti fecisse credebat, vult Magistri pretio compensare* – the unfortunate Judas wants to compensate at the price of the Master for the damage that in his opinion had been caused by the outpouring of the ointment».

According to Mt 26:15, they fixed thirty silver coins, that is, thirty didrams or Temple shekels, the price established by the Torah for the life of a slave (Ex 21:32). Thirty Temple didrams were equivalent to 60 denarii, therefore Judas is well below the price of ointment: «He (the devil) promises you many things, but when the time comes to pay you, he pays badly, he is an evil payer. The serpent has this ability to seduce and to charm...» said Pope Francis in his homily at Santa Marta on 14 September 2015.

Furthermore, at the end of the section of Mk 14: 1-11, a dramatic correlation can be noted between the thinking and acting of the leaders as described in Mk 14:1 and the thinking and acting of Judas Iscariot in Mk 14:10: «the scribes were looking for a way to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him... Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them» (Mk 14:1,10).

The gesture of the woman who anoints Jesus' head is clearly at the center of Mark's opening scene of the passion (Mk 14:1-11). The words and actions of all the other characters are biased by this gesture which is so crucial to grasping the meaning of what is happening.

MEDITATIO

So, let us focus on the woman's gesture. First, the action manifests her immense love and absolute devotion to Jesus. If, in fact, it was customary to anoint the heads of illustrious guests (Ps 23:5), it was usually done with olive oil, certainly not with spikenard ointment costing three hundred denarii, a sum equivalent to a worker's annual salary. Faced with the scandal of some of those present, probably also including the traitor disciple, Jesus discloses the prophetic meaning of the gesture in relation to his passion, death and burial.

Above all, the joyful news of the resurrection as well as the reference to early burial and to the Gospel is also included in the prophecy: «She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her» (Mk 14:8-9).

The courageous woman of Bethany, whom Jesus himself inseparably links to the kerygmatic remembrance of his death and resurrection, is the first of the positive characters that dot Jesus' path to the cross (the young man dressed in a white sheet who timidly tries to follow Jesus to his arrest in Gethsemane, Pilate's wife, Simon of Cyrene, the pious women, the good thief, Mary of Magdala, the Mother of Jesus, the beloved disciple and the women under the cross, the Roman centurion, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus).

Like other female figures in the Gospels, with the exception of the Greek-speaking Syrophenician, who in Mk 7:24-30 demonstrates marked dialectical skills, she is a silent character who entrusts all her eloquence to her actions. «That nameless woman, meant perhaps to represent all those women who down the centuries would be silenced and suffer violence, thus became the first of those women who were significantly present at the supreme moments of Christ's life: his crucifixion, death, burial and resurrection. Women, so often discriminated against and excluded from positions of responsibility, are seen in the Gospels to play a leading role in the history of revelation. Jesus' then goes on to associate that woman with the great mission of evan-

gelization» (Pope Francis, *Message Fifth World Day of the Poor*, 14 November 2021, n. 1).

Jesus praises her simplicity and purity of heart, which allow her to renounce everything that is apparent and to turn to all that is true, like the widow who throws her offering into the temple treasury (Mk 12:44): «she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on») and highlights the prophetic significance of her action, indicated as an anticipated funeral anointing, given that Jesus will rise before his body receives the ritual Jewish anointing: «When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. . . . When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back» (Mk 16:1,4).

In view of this, the saying «for the poor you will always have with you» in Mk 14:7 is understood more clearly.

Judas joining Jesus' adversaries places himself on the side of darkness, while, on the other hand, Jesus indicates that the woman and the poor that he evokes join him in the field of light: «It was no accident that this harsh criticism came from the mouth of the traitor: it shows those who do not respect the poor betray Jesus' teaching and cannot be his disciples» (Pope Francis, *Message Fifth World Day of the Poor*, 14 November 2021, n. 1).

At the center is the mystery of Jesus, Messiah and Son (Mk 1:1), the mystery of his person and of his messiahship, which is revealed not according to worldly criteria of glory and power but in sacrifice and in the gift of oneself even unto the cross.

The poor thus reveal themselves as the privileged "place" of God's revelation to man and about man: «The poor, always and everywhere, evangelize us, because they enable us to discover in new ways the true face of the Father. . . . believers, when they want to see Jesus in person and touch him with their hands, know where to turn. The poor are a sacrament of Christ; they represent his person and point to him» (Pope Francis, *Message Fifth World Day of the Poor*, 14 November 2021, nos. 2,3).

ORATIO - CONTEMPLATIO

«The poor you will always have with you» is a statement that opens the minds of disciples of every age to realize that Jesus' method will not change. It will continue to be that of the incarnation, with virtues, attitudes and a disposition that correspond to it: humility, poverty, self-giving, and sacrifice.

His body offered on the cross will be glorified and can no longer be reached in its pre-Paschal reality by the disciples' gestures of attention, care and love, but it will continue to be tangible in the bodies of the poor, in the flesh of humanity in need of care and salvation: «Jesus was reminding them that he is the first of the poor, the poorest of the poor, because he represents all of them. It was also for the sake of the poor, the lonely, the marginalized and the victims of discrimination, that the Son of God accepted the woman's gesture» (Pope Francis, *Message Fifth World Day of the Poor*, 14 November 2021, n. 1).

The testimonies of the saints, thinking in particular of Saint Martin of Tours, Saint Francis of Assisi, Saint Catherine of Siena, Saint Vincent de Paul, Saint Camillus de Lellis, Saint Teresa of Calcutta, Saint Damien de Veuster, the holy apostle of lepers, cited by Pope Francis in his message (n. 3), show us that with his «For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me», Jesus does not threaten a departure but foretells his decisive passage to paschal glory.

The glory of the Resurrection comes from the humility of the Incarnation and the humiliation of the cross. The glory of the risen body of the Messiah-Son is revealed to us in the sacramental truth of the Eucharist and in the existential truth of the suffering members of the Church, his mystical body and of every human creature.

In one of his poems, Easter Vigil 1966, Saint John Paul II expresses with great intensity the drama of the search for the body of Christ in history, combining the contemplation of Christ's Passover with a meditation on the meaning of Polish and universal history: «Do not separate men from the Man who made himself Body of their history / the human being will not be saved by things but only by Man! / ... / Man - to You I always come - following the meager river of history, / encountering every heart, encountering every thought, / (history - a rush of thoughts and death of hearts) / I seek Your

Body throughout history, / I seek Your depth» (cf. K. Wojtyła, “*Easter Vigil 1966*”, All literary works. Poems, dramas and writings on the theater, Bompiani, Milan 2001, pp. 207-209).

The Body of Jesus cannot be touched and cared for in its earthly state except by seeking him in the bodies of the poor, always with us as an earthly manifestation of His glorious state and, in their own person, *kairói* of the eternal glory of the Son of God:

«When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me’» (Mt 25:31-40).

It is by welcoming the coming of the Lord in the events of everyday life that we are guided to his *Parusía*, when the time of each individual person and that of history in its totality will enter the eternity of God.

In the grandiose fresco of the Last Judgment in the Sistine Chapel, Michelangelo Buonarroti depicted Christ the Lord and Judge of history with the wounds of the Crucified. The King and Lord of the universe forever bears the signs of his love for us: «What a strange and wonderful thing to have a Judge crucified for me!» (G. Moiola).

We will be judged by the One who was crucified for our salvation; we will be judged by the One who chose the cross for himself, the last and lowest place.

May the Holy Virgin, humble servant, welcoming Mother of the Word in

the Annunciation, under the cross and waiting for the fullness of the Holy Spirit, help us to walk in the path of the poverty and humility of her Son, recognizing precisely in poverty the “form” from which the “reform” to which we are called to strive with all our strength, both on a personal and a ecclesial level, is constantly renewed and takes effect: «Just as Christ carried out the work of redemption in poverty and persecution, so the Church is called to follow the same route that it might communicate the fruits of salvation to men. Christ Jesus, “though He was by nature God... emptied Himself, taking the nature of a slave” (Phil 2:6-7) and “being rich, became poor”(2Cor 8:9) for our sakes. Thus, the Church, although it needs human resources to carry out its mission, is not set up to seek earthly glory, but to proclaim, even by its own example, humility and self-sacrifice. Christ was sent by the Father “to bring good news to the poor, to heal the contrite of heart” (Lk 4:18) “to seek and to save what was lost”(Lk 19:10). Similarly, the Church encompasses with love all who are afflicted with human suffering and in the poor and afflicted sees the image of its poor and suffering Founder. It does all it can to relieve their need and in them it strives to serve Christ» (Conc. Vat. II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, 8).

Echoing the words of the Council at the beginning of his Petrine ministry on March 16, 2013, explaining why he had chosen the name of the poor man of Assisi, the Pope exclaimed: «How I would like a poor Church for the poor!».

From Psalm 40 (39)

I waited patiently for the LORD;
he inclined to me and heard my cry.

He drew me up from the desolate pit,
out of the miry bog,
and set my feet upon a rock,
making my steps secure.

He put a new song in my mouth,

a song of praise to our God.
Many will see and fear,
and put their trust in the LORD.

Happy are those who make
the LORD their trust,
who do not turn to the proud,
to those who go astray after false gods.

You have multiplied, O LORD my God,
your wondrous deeds and your thoughts toward us;
none can compare with you.
Were I to proclaim and tell of them,
they would be more than can be counted.

Sacrifice and offering you do not desire,
but you have given me an open ear.
Burnt offering and sin offering
you have not required.

Then I said, "Here I am;
in the scroll of the book it is written of me.
I delight to do your will, O my God;
your law is within my heart."

But may all who seek you
rejoice and be glad in you;
may those who love your salvation
say continually, "Great is the Lord!"

As for me, I am poor and needy,
but the Lord takes thought for me.
You are my help and my deliverer;
do not delay, O my God.

COMMENT I

«The poor you will always have with you» (Mk 14:7)

At the opening of his Message for the Fifth *World Day of the Poor*, Pope Francis writes: «“The poor you will always have with you” (Mk 14:7). Jesus spoke these words at a meal in Bethany, in the home of a certain Simon, known as the leper, a few days before Passover. As the Evangelist recounts, a woman came in with an alabaster flask full of precious ointment and poured it over Jesus’ head. This caused great amazement and gave rise to two different interpretations» (n. 1), which the Pope himself illustrates. First, the indignation of those present: «Why was the ointment thus wasted? For this ointment might have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and given to the poor» (Mk 14:4-5). On the other hand, there is Jesus’ interpretation: «Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me» (Mk 14:6). Then he adds «For you always will have the poor with you, an allusion to a passage in the Torah (“there will never cease to be some in need on the earth” Dt 15:11) - and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me» (Mk 14:7). In essence, as the Pope further adds «Jesus is the first of the poor, the poorest of the poor, because he represents all of them» (n. 1).

But before picking up further ideas for meditation from the Message, let us follow the plot of this evocative Gospel story, a sort of prophecy situated at the beginning of the passion, which will end with the body of Jesus not being anointed by the female disciples, who will find the tomb empty (cf. Mk 16: 1-4). During his last earthly Passover, in the evening Jesus left Jerusalem and the temple where he taught to go to Bethany on the Mount of Olives (cf. Mk 11:11,19). Bethany, “house of the poor”, is the village where Lazarus, Martha and Mary lived, but here Jesus is the guest of a certain Simon, a leper, an impure man whom the Law even forbade to sit at table. Jesus goes towards his passion as he had always lived, sharing his life with the poor and the marginalized.

While he is at table, as prescribed for the feast of Passover, a woman arrives unexpectedly. Without speaking, she prophesies with a very eloquent

gesture, a highly symbolic action. She has an alabaster jar with her containing ointment, an expensive and very pure nard. She enters, goes to Jesus, breaks the neck of the jar and pours the ointment on his head (cf. Mk 14: 3). Why does she do it? We do not know; we only know that a gesture like this can only be done out of love. A profoundly feminine intuition that comes from love urged her to give the Rabbi of Nazareth a sign of affection and consolation, as if to say to him: «I anoint you with ointment to express my desire that after death your body shall not be corrupted». Precious ointment poured out, as the body of Jesus will be delivered over and his blood shed. In that evening twilight, that anonymous woman celebrates love, prophesying that Jesus is about to give his life by loving «to the end» (Jn 13:1).

Following, is the scandal on the part of those present, those who are indignant with the woman. They do not know love: they do not love Jesus, but above all they do not know how to discern in him the poor man par excellence, who is going towards passion and death. The opposite interpretation given by Jesus, which we have already mentioned, is able to see in the woman's concrete behavior "a good and beautiful action" (*kalòn érgon*). As the beloved disciple will later say: «Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action» (1 Jn 3:18). Great judgement on the part of this woman: «She has done what she could» (Mk 14:8), like the poor widow who, by throwing two coins into the temple treasury, prompted Jesus' comment: «but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on» (Mk 12:44).

The Pope's words commenting on the entire narrative are particularly eloquent: «This powerful "empathy" established between Jesus and the woman, and his own interpretation of her anointing as opposed to the scandalized view of Judas and others, can lead to a fruitful reflection on the inseparable link between Jesus, the poor and the proclamation of the Gospel.

The face of God revealed by Jesus is that of a Father concerned for and close to the poor. In everything, Jesus teaches that poverty is not the result of fate, but a concrete sign pointing to his presence among us. We do not find him when and where we want, but see him in the lives of the poor, in their sufferings and needs, in the often inhuman conditions in which they are forced to live. As I never tire of repeating, the poor are true evangelizers, for they were the first to be evangelized and called to share in the Lord's joy and

his kingdom (cf. Mt 5:3)» (*Message* n. 2).

A mutual sharing: the poor have shared in the Lord's blessedness and in his Kingdom, just as Jesus shared in their lot (cf. *Message* 3). And this correspondence is also open to us who meditate here and now on the Gospel: We need, then, wholeheartedly to follow the Lord's invitation to "repent and believe in the Gospel" (Mk 1:15). This conversion consists primarily in opening our hearts to recognizing the many different forms of poverty and manifesting the Kingdom of God through a lifestyle consistent with the faith we profess. Often the poor are viewed as persons apart, as a "category" in need of specific charitable services. Yet following Jesus entails changing this way of thinking and embracing the challenge of mutual sharing and involvement» (*Message* n. 4).

Then, as happened on that evening for the woman of Bethany, we will be able to experience that the true name of poverty is sharing, that "sharing" that "generates fraternity" (*Message* 3). Here is the concrete face of fraternity: fraternal sharing, practiced from time to time in the forms and ways that are discerned as good. In this regard, read the famous "summaries" of the Acts of the Apostles (cf. Acts 2:42-45; 4:32-35; 5:12-16) in which, among other things, it is said that in the early Christian community precisely because of the sharing of goods «there was not a needy person among them» (Acts 4:34). The Christian is therefore a man or a woman who works to relieve the situation of need that makes his or her brother or sister suffer. This happened in the different forms of sharing practiced by the primitive communities; this has happened throughout the history of the Church; this must still happen today. May the example of the woman of Bethany and the constant example of Jesus, the poor man par excellence, guide us on this journey.





LECTIO DIVINA

Second Proposal

«THE NEEDY WILL NEVER BE LACKING
IN THE LAND...»

(Dt 15:11)

LECTIO

Dt 15:1-15

Every seventh year you shall grant a remission of debts. And this is the manner of the remission: every creditor shall remit the claim that is held against a neighbor, not exacting it of a neighbor who is a member of the community, because the Lord's remission has been proclaimed. Of a foreigner you may exact it, but you must remit your claim on whatever any member of your community owes you. There will, however, be no one in need among you, because the Lord is sure to bless you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you as a possession to occupy, if only you will obey the Lord your God by diligently observing this entire commandment that I command you today. When the Lord your God has blessed you, as he promised you, you will lend to many nations, but you will not borrow; you will rule over many nations, but they will not rule over you. If there is among you anyone in need, a member of your community in any of your towns within the land that the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward your needy neighbor. You should rather open your hand, willingly lending enough to meet the need, whatever it may be. Be careful that you do not entertain a mean thought, thinking, "The seventh year, the year of remission, is near," and therefore view your needy neighbor with hostility and give nothing; your neighbor might cry to the Lord against you, and you would incur guilt. Give liberally and be ungrudging when you do so, for on this account the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake. Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land." If a member of your community, whether a Hebrew man or a Hebrew woman, is sold to you and works for you six years, in the seventh year you shall set that person free. And when you send a male slave out from you a free person, you shall not send him out empty-handed. Provide liberally out of your flock, your threshing floor, and your wine press, thus giving to him some of the bounty with which the Lord your God has blessed you. Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God redeemed you; for this reason, I lay this command upon you today.

MEDITATIO

«The poor you will always have with you» (Mk 14:7). This statement is a promise and, at the same time, a caution that the Lord wished to leave behind in the imminence of his Passion, Death and Resurrection and which must challenge his disciples in every age. From the dawn of her history, the Church has experienced the truth of these words. Already in the first community in Jerusalem, the presence of a number of needy brothers and sisters is mentioned. Their needs were met by the wealthier believers who, under the guidance of the apostles, shared their goods (cf. Acts 2:45; 4:34-35). Paul also did his best for the poor of the Church in Jerusalem by organizing collections among the communities of Achaia and Macedonia (cf. Rom 15:25-27; 2 Cor 8:1, 9:1-15; Gal 2:10). The apostle James also urges his followers to show their faith by taking care of the most destitute (cf. Jas 2: 5-6; 14-17). In every age, the presence of poorer brothers and sisters has characterized the life of the Christian communities and, in our time, the pandemic has highlighted the relevance of Jesus' words.

These sound like a promise when taken in the context in which they are spoken. Jesus reminds those who reprimanded the woman of Bethany for wasting the precious ointment used to anoint his head that the poor will always be within the sphere of their daily lives, while his earthly existence is coming to an end (cf. Mk 14:7). What Jesus said should not be misunderstood as if he were saying that the service rendered to him was an alternative to that of the poor. Rather, by saying that the needy will always be present in the future, Jesus indicates that when he is no longer physically present among his own, they will be able to continue to meet and serve him precisely in the least ones. Together with the Eucharist, which Jesus will institute a few days after the meal in Bethany (Mk 14:12-26) and in which he remains present forever in his Church, the poor are a privileged place of encounter with him. On the other hand, one cannot love the Eucharistic body of the Lord if one does not honor his mystical body, the Church, especially in its weakest members (cf. 1 Cor 11:17-32). In the good work done for the neediest, the disciples will be able to express their love for the Lord, mindful of his words: «Just as you

did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me» (Matt 25:40).

Besides being a promise of his future presence among his own, Jesus' words are a strong warning to them. He is not describing the phenomenon of poverty, in which one is resigned to the realization that there is nothing one can do to improve the situation in which the poor find themselves. Rather, Jesus' statement should be a constant spur for every believer and community called to fight with all their means to overcome all forms of poverty that mortify human life. Jesus' words should in no way insinuate disengagement or passivity as based on the Old Testament command found in Dt 15:11: «Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, "Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land"». Jesus' warning is therefore a call to take responsibility towards the poor with no room for hesitation or delegation.

The substance of Jesus' statement in Mk 14:7 is even clearer when we look at the description of each of the characters who appear in the story of the Bethany meal (Mk 14:3-9). The center of the scene is certainly Jesus, invited to the home of a certain Simon the leper. Given the situation of social marginalization in which lepers were condemned to live (cf. Lv 13:45-46), it is unlikely that this man was still suffering from this disease, but it is possible that he had been healed of it. This brief mention of the identity of the head of the house suggests Jesus' care and concern for the least of these. In fact, even if he were healed, a leper would have had to struggle to reintegrate into society. By accepting the man's invitation to dinner, Jesus manifests his closeness to him. He knows how to draw close to the poor because he himself lives this condition. In this regard, we must not forget that the episode of Bethany takes place between the story of the plots of the leaders against Jesus who are trying to deceive and kill him (Mk 14:1-2), and that of Judas' betrayal (Mk 14:10-11). In this context, Jesus is presented as the one who shares the lot of those who are victims of injustice, lies and abandonment and who makes himself like them by becoming a merciful and faithful high priest (Heb 2:17). In this way, having been rich, he becomes poor in order to enrich people through his poverty (2 Cor 8:9). Precisely because Jesus shares their condition, the poor will prolong his presence in the world even after his death.

ORATIO - CONTEMPLATIO

With her anointing of Jesus' head, the anonymous woman carries out a gesture that brings her close to the suffering that Jesus is about to experience. She probably only wanted to perform a simple act of courtesy that was customary for guests at a banquet (cf. Ps 23:5; Lk 7:46). But, according to Jesus' interpretation, her gesture becomes a prophecy of the Master's death and burial (Mk 14:8). In this sense, her good work expresses a concern for the "poor" Jesus, at the very moment when he is preparing to undergo his passion. Just as Jesus offered his life on the cross, the woman expresses her closeness in a gesture of self-giving. She comes close to Jesus and pours scented oil of real nard on his head, the value of which is estimated by those present at three hundred denarii, corresponding to a year's wages. As was often the case in antiquity, such precious ointments were kept in equally precious containers, such as the alabaster vase of which the evangelist speaks. To anoint Jesus, the woman breaks this jar. This is a detail that portrays the totality to the woman's offering. She does not intend to keep any of the precious ointment; she "wastes" it entirely on Jesus. The generosity of her gesture thus stands out, similar to the magnanimity of the widow praised by Jesus in front of the temple treasury, where she had given everything she had to live on (Mk 12:44). Like the widow, the woman of Bethany is at the opposite end of the spectrum from the calculating attitude of the Jewish authorities (Mk 14:1-2) and the greed of Judas (Mk 14:10-11). Although she does not live in poverty, as the possession of such a precious ointment suggests, she knows how to draw close to Jesus with her generosity. Her gesture takes on a significance that goes beyond the historical singularity of the moment in which it occurred. Wherever the Gospel is preached, her good deed will be remembered in her memory (Mk 14:9). Generous attention to the poor is a continuation of the Gospel proclamation inaugurated by Jesus: it is not by chance that service to the poor often becomes the most effective witness to the Gospel. Those

who love the Lord in the poor become Good News, themselves, a living Gospel that grows together with those who incarnate it throughout history.

The gesture made by the woman is not understood by those present: the precious ointment could have been sold and the proceeds given as alms. Apparently, their objection is legitimate, all the more so in the imminence of the feast of Passover, when Jewish piety recommended particular generosity towards the poor (cf. Jn 13:27-29). However, a twofold consideration brings out the inappropriateness of their attitude. First, they speak of the poor, but, unlike Jesus and the woman, they do not make any act of closeness or generosity. There is no point in talking about the least if one is not willing to act concretely and personally to alleviate the condition of poverty in which they live. Not he who says, but he who does the will of the Father, will enter the kingdom of heaven (cf. Mt 7:21). Moreover, the reason for the inappropriateness of the indignant rebuke of the bystanders is indicated by Jesus himself (Mk 14:7): they are not aware of the deadly plot being woven around Jesus' life and therefore cannot discern the prophetic significance of the woman's gesture. Poverty is never a condition to be sought far from one's daily life, nor are the poor an abstract concept on which to build complex welfare theories and to be hypocritically reminded only on major social or religious occasions. Rather, attention to the poor begins by being aware of the needs of our brothers and sisters who we ordinarily meet in our daily lives, fixing our eyes on those who, often with heart-rending dignity, experience suffering that needs understanding, closeness, affection and prayer.

The Poor...

We have met you, in refugee camps in Africa, America, Asia, but also in Europe and Oceania.

We have shaken hands with you in our listening centers, in hospitals and institutes, in soup kitchens and emporia.

We have met your eyes in prisons, in the suburbs and in the middle of fields, whether fertile or arid, steppe or desert.

We have smelled the odor of the dumps, of the slums, of the sidewalks, where you are forced to live. Directly or indirectly.

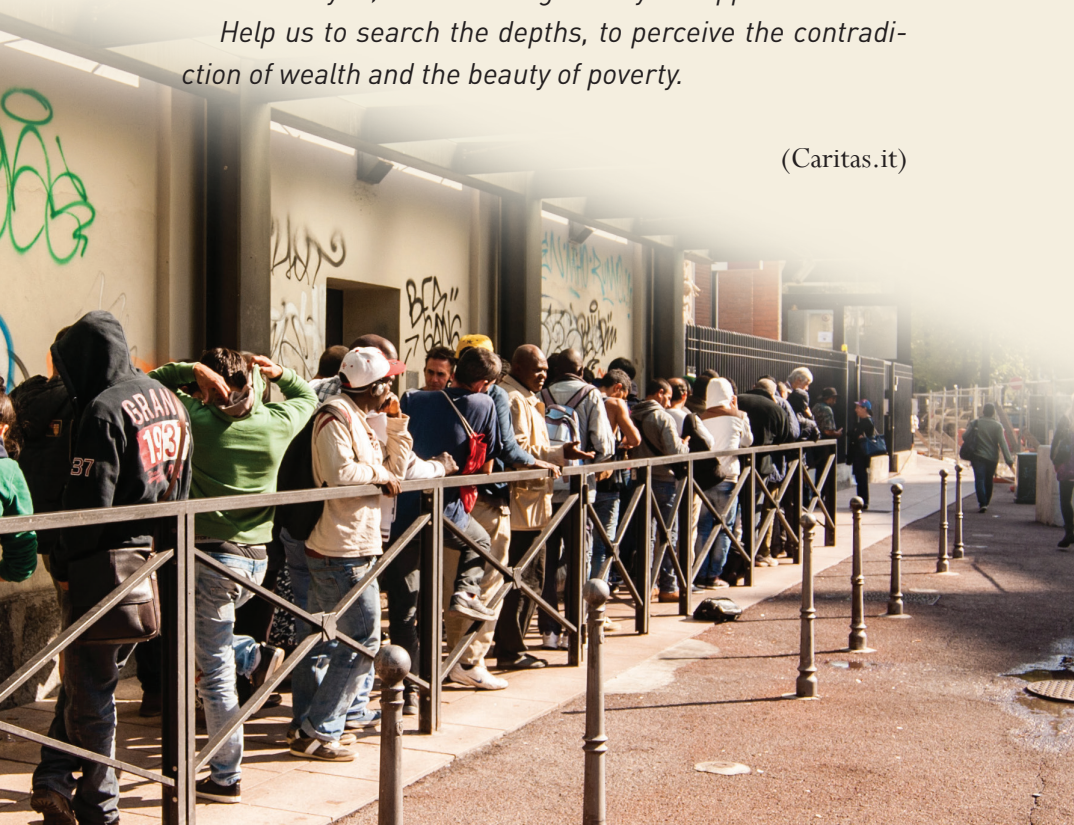
In person or through testimonies, projects of the local churches, individuals, communities.

We have watched you, heard you, smelled you, touched you, even tasted you. With all of our five senses. In all five continents.

We have embraced you, O Lord. But often we have not understood you, we have not gone beyond appearances.

Help us to search the depths, to perceive the contradiction of wealth and the beauty of poverty.

(Caritas.it)



COMMENT II

The poor and the rich: the need for one another

Wealth and an abundance of goods are presented in the Bible as signs of God's blessing. Abraham was very rich in livestock, in silver and in gold (Gen 13:2); Isaac sowed seed in that land, and in the same year reaped a hundredfold. The Lord blessed him, and the man became rich; he prospered more and more until he became very wealthy (Gen 26:12-13); Jacob owned countless oxen, donkeys, and flocks (Gen 32:6). To the righteous the psalmists promise: Wealth and riches are in their houses (Ps 112:3); you shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands; you shall be happy, and it shall go well with you (Ps 128:2). At the end of a particularly good agricultural season, a poet sings of his people's joy: May our barns be filled with produce of every kind; may our sheep increase by thousands, by tens of thousands in our fields, and may our cattle be heavy with young. May there be no breach in the walls, no exile, and no cry of distress in our streets. Happy are the people to whom such blessings fall; happy are the people whose God is the Lord! (Ps 144:13-15).

However, the abundance of goods is not always the fruit of the Lord's blessing; on the contrary, it is often the result of injustice, fraud, and violations of the rights of the weakest, as the prophets denounce: for wheat we will make the ephah small and the shekel great, and practice deceit with false balances, buying the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals (Am 8:5-6); tear the skin off my people, and the flesh off their bones (Mic 3:2).

There is a wealth blessed by the Lord - that which is the fruit of one's own honest labor - but in the Bible poverty and misery are never a blessing, they are always consequences of misfortunes, injustices and, at times, even of laziness, idleness, intemperance: A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and poverty will come upon you like a robber (Pr 24:33-34).

God's promise to Israel, to the people who follow his ways, is that all hardship will disappear: There will be no one in need among you... if only you will obey the Lord your God (Dt 15:4-5). Yet, immediately after this comforting promise, the Lord goes on to say: since there will never cease to

be some in need on the earth (Dt 15:11). How do we reconcile these two statements?

Even in the NT we find this apparent incongruity. Jesus stated: The poor you will always have with you. Yet, from the first Christian community the poor vanished: There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need (Acts 4:34-35). Thus, an alternative society started in Jerusalem, based on sharing and helping one's brothers and sisters, so that no one is poor. It may seem paradoxical, but this community is made up of poor people. Not of the unfortunate, who have become poor because of misfortune or catastrophe, but by people who, moved by the Spirit of Christ, have chosen to have nothing and to hand over everything to their brothers and sisters out of love. These are the poor in spirit, the builders of the new world, of the kingdom of God. There is a long tradition in the Church that has identified in the poor in spirit those who, while retaining possession of their goods, do not bind their hearts to them and are generous in giving alms to those less fortunate. Almsgiving is a praiseworthy gesture, but it is the unequivocal sign that the world has not yet accepted the new justice; in fact, it presupposes that on earth the accumulation of wealth can continue to exist alongside poverty. In Hebrew there is not even the term almsgiving; it is called *tzedakah*, which means justice. And there is no mention of almsgiving in the Bible until the books of Tobias and Sirach, the only books in which it is encouraged. It is not sporadic help to the poor - help that often serves to pacify consciences - it is not the occasional good gesture that introduces into the world the new relationship between people desired by God. Jesus does not exhort his disciples to give something to their needy brother, he wants them to hand over everything, their whole self, their whole life. This is the new justice.

Ancient justice was based on the seemingly reasonable principle of to each his own. But this principle rests on a false premise; it derives from the assumption that something belongs to man, while everything belongs to God. The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it (Ps 24:1). All possessive adjectives are a lie: nothing is mine, nothing is yours,

nothing is ours, everything is God's and everything is freely given by him. Man is master of nothing; his very life is a gift he has received. What do you have that you did not receive? And if you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift? (1 Cor 4:7). Man is only the steward of goods that are not his own and one day he will be called to account for this stewardship.

God made us well: in need of one another. If we were self-sufficient, we would be incapable of loving, we would turn in on ourselves, we would not need anyone, we would not care about others. Instead, in order to live we are forced to meet others, to give and receive the goods that the Lord has placed in our hands. We are all rich in these gifts and all poor, all in need of what only our brother can give us. That is why Jesus said: the poor are always with you. It is this exchange of gifts that makes life possible.

But by what criteria should this exchange take place? There are many parables in the Gospels showing two ways to manage goods, one foolish (áphroon) and one wise (phronimós). The first is embodied by those who, forgetting that they are simple managers of goods that belong to God, consider themselves masters and believe that the exchange must take place according to market law. They remove from their minds and hearts the thought that everything derives from the gratuitousness of God and begin to scrutinize the needs of their brother with greed. Their goal is to negotiate and make money on the exchange. This is why they bless the needy; indeed, they hope that they thrive, so they can increase the price and get richer and richer. In fact, it is not work that makes them rich, but business.

It is from this false relationship with material goods, from the evil instinct that leads to taking possession of them and accumulating them, that all evil derives: the wars, violence, conflicts, jealousies and the inhumane world that is before our eyes (1 Tim 6:10) and that awaits and begs to be redeemed (Rm 8:19-25). This is the foolish choice of those who delude themselves that they can find joy by accumulating goods, reaching positions of prestige, degrees, recognition. They will be able to obtain pleasure, not joy. The greed to accumulate more and more makes one go mad, makes one remove the thought of death, makes one forget the moment of dispossession. At the end of life everything that has not been delivered to the recipients - the needy - is seized

(Lk 2:13-21).

What then is the wise choice? It is written in the Treatise on Blessings of the Babylonian Talmud that anyone who enjoys something of this world without having said the blessing commits the sin of appropriation. The moment in which one enjoys the world's resources, he/she must immediately recognize the One who gave them, the Master, and give thanks. The wise person is the one who becomes aware that everything is grace, gratuity, gift and rejoices in feeling enveloped by God's gratuity. This is the truth, ownership is falsehood. The evangelical image of the world is that of the banquet hall to which the Lord invites every one of his children from the moment he calls them to life. Man is one who rejoices with his brothers and sisters for the gifts that the Father has made freely available to everyone. This is the reason why - according to Jesus' parable (Lk 14:15-24) - so many refuse the invitation, remain outside the banquet hall, do not accept the logic of gratuitousness, and prefer to continue to manage goods guided by selfish desires. In Matthew's version of the parable of the banquet, there are also those who accept the invitation, enter the banquet hall, but without the wedding garment (Mt 22:11-14), the garment worn by the Bridegroom, Christ, the garment of gratuitous love.

He represents those who deceive themselves that they belong to the new world, to the Kingdom of God, because they fulfill some devout religious practice, they even give alms, but they do not accept to change their dress, they continue to wear the pagan dress, that of those who prefer to negotiate goods. It is the guest who does not behave as a guest, but as a master. He is thrown out into the old world where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth, in hell, in the chaos of that world where competition, career-seeking, oppression, exploitation of the weakest reigns. There one can win, but sooner or later one is overwhelmed. Jesus demands total detachment from the selfish management of go-



ods: So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions (Lk 14:33); Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal (Matt 6:19-20). It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God (Mk 10:25).

Only a divine force bestowed from Heaven can overcome the evil instinct in man that leads him to retreat into material goods and keep them for himself. This force is the Spirit of Christ, the divine life which man has received as a gift. It is this Spirit that instructs him and urges him to surrender everything out of love. Blessed is he who becomes poor because, moved by the Spirit, he hands over everything to his poor brother and sister. Sin is to deny this nature of God's children, sin is to dehumanize oneself, because we are fully human only when we are involved in the free and unconditional love of the Father.



THEOLOGICAL-PASTORAL COMMENTARY

Boundless love

Mark the evangelist places the episode of the anointing of Jesus in Bethany, in Hebrew “house of the poor”, in what is now El-Azariah, at the foot of the eastern coast of the Mount of Olives, about three kilometers from Jerusalem towards Jericho. The gesture of the anonymous woman - in Mark’s Gospel - takes on the characteristics of a momentous prophecy. The episode is situated in chapter 14 of the Gospel, at the threshold of the drama of Jesus’ passion, when the history of salvation will reach its apex in the cruel violence that will turn the body of the man of Nazareth into a mere object of sadistic torments. Goodness and boundless love on the one hand, cruelty and misery on the other, are the extremes that intertwine in Mark’s brief passage, at the center of which are Jesus’ words and his reference to the omnipresence of the poor. The Master enters the house of a poor man, that of Simon the leper. His life is blatantly marked by the disease that has become so profound that he has been given the nickname “leper”. He is a man who has experienced misery and isolation because of an infirmity that makes his body and soul unclean. Jesus’ entry into Bethany is the sign that reveals the effectiveness of his saving work for which «those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick» (cf. Mk 2:16-17). In the house, Jesus makes a second prophetic gesture, that of fellowship at the table. Its meaning is understood in the prolepsis that refers to the table of the Last Supper, where the gift of the body and blood that inaugurates the time of the new and eternal covenant is celebrated. While he was dining with his disciples and Simon, a woman suddenly bursts in. Mark describes her appearance as a dramatic turn of events. A precious detail of the woman is noted: she holds in her hand «an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard» (Mk 4:3). The nard seems to evoke the personification of the bride in the Song of Songs (SS 4:13) and evidently takes the form of an announcement of the burial of the bridegroom who does not deny himself to the nuptial bed of redemptive death.

What is a woman doing in a situation like Mark describes in the intimacy of the relationship between the disciples and the Master? Her ill-timed appearance is heightened by the shattering of the alabaster jar and the pouring of the oil on Jesus' head. Everyone's eyes, like floodlights lighting a thief's escape, are on her. In the hearts of the bystanders the feelings of indignation and anger arise. Their reaction seems justified even by the reasoning that follows: "Why this waste of ointment? It could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor! You can't argue with this reasoning, and we even agree with this way of thinking. Blinded by the glow of philanthropism, communities of believers risk losing the central point from which they must start: Jesus!

A turnaround is necessary when we see the rampant submission to the mentality of filling our existential voids with good works for the health of the soul. Pushed to the extreme, this distorted way of thinking leads to a false interpretation of God. We come to think of him as a rich storehouse from which to draw what we need, thus avoiding, a priori, the possibility of "drinking the cup" of his will in the Gethsemane of our lives. Thinking they are doing good, the diners, in reality, are expressing their spiritual poverty.

Doing good to the poor is an indispensable work; we could dare to say, it is the work on which God will judge us. On this subject, it is always appropriate and timely to refer to the eschatological discourse of chapter twenty-five of Matthew. The temptation, however, to transform such gestures into philanthropic works is strong and risks involving many of our faith communities. With a certain pastoral concern and apostolic courage, Pope Francis has repeatedly warned of the danger of «transforming the Church into a spiritual association - a multinational corporation to launch ethical-religious initiatives and messages. It is not an NGO, the Church is something else». The Bethany symposium denounces the philanthropic approach that aims to do good, regardless of God. The Caritas soup kitchens, listening centers, information services, and all the initiatives aimed at promoting attention to the needy, in order to fulfill the commandment of love for the poor, are of no use if we do not start from the heart of the Gospel that urges us to be heralds of hope

and witnesses of the grace of Christ's love for us and our love for Christ. «Charitas Christi urget nos!» (cf. 2Cor 5:14). The love of Christ is the source of immeasurable clarity and inestimable preciousness from which everything proceeds and to which everything is recapitulated. In this sense, the woman's gesture becomes a prophecy of a good work, the only one recognized as such by Jesus in the house of Bethany. It forcefully imposes itself on every believer.

Breaking of that alabaster jar was wasteful, but is to be understood in the dynamic of boundless love. Mark is attentive to every detail and offers us readers the possibility of getting an idea of the amount of the "waste". The nard used was worth more than three hundred denarii, the equivalent of a laborer's annual wage. The evangelist once again highlights the woman's extravagant generosity, given that one coin was the daily wage of a laborer (cf. Matt 20:2).

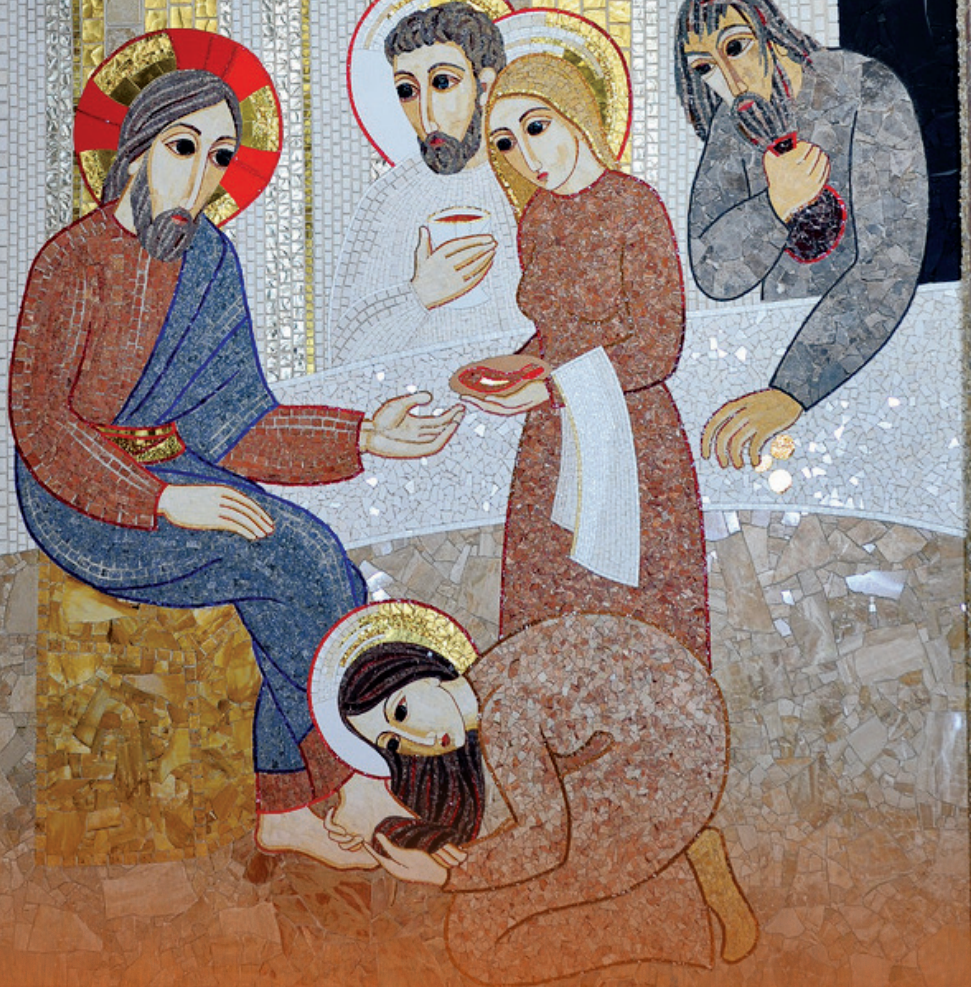
The heart of Jesus' discourse, which praises the woman's good deed and protects her from the growing hatred of her fellow diners, is revealed in a concise statement that lends itself to various interpretations: «For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me» (Mk 14:7). Jesus is not at all disinterested in the social plight of poverty, he does not reason as a disembodied person. On this aspect it is useful to stress the dogmatic principle of the incarnation of Christ that leads us to consider in the right sense his being on earth as true God and true Man. Therefore, it is wrong to think that the problem of poverty was alien to the Master's heart, as it was almost an extension of his preaching. The gospel proclaimed by Jesus sees the poor as its main subject. His messianic nature, in fact, is fulfilled in his full identification with the suffering servant announced by the prophets and in his assimilation in everything to human misery, with the exception of sin (cf. Phil 2:7-8). The correct sense of Jesus' statement on the omnipresence of the poor is made clear in the woman's gesture.

Her "scandalous" action is a useful occasion to help us reflect on the priorities that animate our "divine appetites" and on the motivations that drive us to do good, with or without God. It turns out, without too much wonder,

that the poor are not the heart of the Gospel and that the more or less proclaimed attention to the needy does not make the Church credible. It is possible to do good without believing in God, it is possible to help the destitute without the Gospel preached by Jesus. There are non-believers who manage to feed the hungry better than those who believe, there are atheists who give more than we do. Jesus himself refers in this Gospel pericope to a passage from Deuteronomy in which it is emphasized that the poor will never cease to be on the earth. This Old Testament quotation sheds light on a practice prior to his ministry. Concrete realities demanded the adoption of an extensive and carefully regulated system of giving that included the obligation to tithe as well as numerous opportunities for personal charity (cf. Dt. 15:11).

On what do we base the specific features of Christian charity? Undoubtedly on the love of Christ which is able to “christify” every work so that it becomes a good work, like the one the woman did towards Jesus. There will never be a shortage of occasions to serve the poor, but there may be a shortage of opportunities to serve them out of the love of God whose fault is boundless excess. Hence the certainty for those who live in the time of Jesus’ absence is that they do not have to come to terms with the alternative “Christ or the poor,” because they discover the beauty of the possibility of serving Christ in the poor and the poor in Christ. The identification of the poor in Jesus is the true response to the dramas of history which, from age to age, reinterprets the dehumanization of the needy transfigured in the glorification that the Father has achieved through the Son’s obedience. The Church is always engaged in a continuous reform of herself and in a slow process of purification of ideas that lead her to overcome the sterile forms of assistance that weaken her pilgrimage towards being assumed in the category of the Kingdom of God.

The Church of the poor is the womb of Christ’s overflowing love for humanity, symbolically announced by the prophecy of the anointing of the woman in the house of Bethany. In her is celebrated the anointing of Emmanuel, God with us, whose presence is visible in the faces of those poor who “will always be with us”.



PRAYER VIGIL

«THE POOR YOU WILL ALWAYS
HAVE WITH YOU»

(Mk 14:7)

Introduction

Being aware of the poor is a daily task carried out both by being close to people in difficulty and by remembering them before the Lord.

This prayer vigil is not a “one-time” event, that is, a celebration that takes place only once a year because it is somehow called for by circumstances, but it should become a prayerful expression of all the action that a community undertakes in favor of people in need every day. So, the invitation to the vigil is extended to all persons of good will and to all communities, parishes or religious families, who are dedicated in various ways to helping the poor in body and in spirit.

Thus, the vigil was planned emphasizing that the origin of our steadfast action on behalf of the poor, as well as the goal of all our efforts on their behalf, is found in God, who inspires our hearts to devote ourselves to our neighbor. Seeing a poor person not only as a victim or as an unfortunate person, but above all as a human being, in whom the image of God himself is imprinted, distinguishes the Christian approach from others, since the encounter with a person in need is meeting God in person.

In the first statio, the guiding passage from Mark’s Gospel challenges our heart as to whether we are able to recognize the abiding presence of God himself in the silent existence of the poor. It is a question that comes from the Gospel: do I see a needy person, an unfortunate poor person, or do I recognize the presence of the living God in him?

The second statio revolves around the passage from the Second Letter to the Corinthians (8:1-15) where we are confronted with the Lord who makes himself poor for us in order to make us rich. Jesus Christ’s style of action should inspire our actions as well.

Please note that the texts selected in this guide are only suggestions. Those responsible for organizing the vigil should adapt the celebration to the particular needs of a specific community (parish, hospital chapel, monastery, etc.)

Songs could be chosen for each statio, while to develop recurring themes in the biblical texts, another meditation could be prepared, or some testimonies could be chosen, depending on the needs and possibilities of the community celebrating the vigil. Before the final blessing, there could be another intercessory prayer, said by the priest himself or by the faithful and dedicated to the various situations in which the poor live.

The choice of biblical passages could also be modified at the discretion of the organizers of the vigil. For example: Lk 16:19-31 (parable of Lazarus and the rich man), a statio could be prepared inspired by the life of a saint or, in any case, of a person who is known for serving the poor and for witnessing to a Christian life.

The vigil could take place with the Blessed Sacrament exposed.

The presider exposes the Blessed Sacrament as usual. This is followed by a song and an introductory word, which might be as follows:

O *The World Day of the Poor* is an occasion to thank the Lord for the opportunities He has given us to encounter Him in the poor and for the good we have been able to accomplish, but it is also a time to reflect on what we have accomplished during the past year. This Day also challenges us on how we perceive the continuous presence of the poor. For us, are the poor just unfortunate and mistreated by fate? Or are we able to see in them the living God who comes to meet us?

With these questions we want to begin our reflection on Jesus' words: «The poor you will always have with you».

A song follows.

FIRST STATIO

See and encounter Jesus in the poor

Let us listen to the word of the Lord from the Gospel according to Mark (14:3-9)

«While he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head. But some were there who said to one another in anger, “Why was the ointment wasted in this way? For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor.” And they scolded her. But Jesus said, “Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me. She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. Truly I tell you, whenever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her”».

It would be fitting if one of the participants could give a testimony about their service to the poor, emphasizing its spiritual aspect. If this is not possible, testimonies already present in several books or available on the web could be used.

As an alternative, the following passages could be used for community reflection.

From the Message of Pope Francis for the World Day of the Poor 2021

A The interpretation of the Gospel passage just heard is given by Jesus himself, and allows us to grasp the profound meaning of the woman's gesture. He says, “Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me” (Mk 14:6). Jesus knows that his death is near and he sees in that gesture the anticipation of the anointing of his lifeless body before being placed in the tomb. This vision goes beyond any expectation of the guests. Jesus reminds them that He is the first of the poor, the poorest of the poor because he represents everyone. And it is also in the name of the poor, of the

lonely, marginalized and discriminated against that the Son of God accepts the woman's gesture. With her feminine sensitivity, she shows that she is the only one who understands the Lord's state of mind (...)

This strong "empathy" between Jesus and the woman, and the way in which he interprets his anointing, in contrast with the scandalized vision of Judas and others, open a fruitful way for reflecting on the inseparable bond that exists between Jesus, the poor and the proclamation of the Gospel.

In fact, the face of God that he reveals is that of a Father for the poor and close to the poor. All of Jesus' work affirms that poverty is not the fruit of fate, but a concrete sign of his presence among us. We do not find him when and where we want, but we recognize him in the life of the poor, in their suffering and destitution, in the sometimes inhuman conditions in which they are forced to live. I never tire of repeating that the poor are true evangelizers because they were the first to be evangelized and called to share the beatitude of the Lord and his Kingdom (cf. Mt 5: 3).

The poor of every condition and everywhere evangelize us, because they allow us to rediscover the most genuine features of the Father's face in an ever new way».

Bruno Ferrero

The old woman who was waiting for God

Once upon a time there was an old lady who spent many hours of the day in pious prayer. One day she heard the voice of God telling her: "Today I will come to visit you." Imagine the joy and pride of the old woman. She began to clean and polish, knead and bake cakes. She then she put on her most beautiful dress and she began to wait for the arrival of God. After a while, someone knocked on the door. The old woman ran to open the door. But it was only her neighbor who asked her to borrow a pinch of salt. The old woman pushed her away: "For the love of God, go now, I really don't have time for this nonsense!" I am waiting for God, in my house! Go away!". And she banged the door in the face of the mortified neighbor. A little later, someone knocked again. The old woman looked in the mirror, straightened up and ran

to open the door.

But who was there? A boy bundled up in an oversized jacket selling cheap buttons and soaps.

The old woman blurted out: «I'm waiting for the good Lord. I don't have time. Come back another time!» And she closed the door on the poor boy's nose.

Shortly thereafter there was a knock on the door again. The old woman opened it and found a ragged and badly dressed old man. "A piece of bread, kind lady, even stale ... And if you could let me rest for a moment here on the steps of your house," the poor man begged. "Ah, no! Leave me alone! I am waiting for God! And stay away from my steps!" the old woman said angrily. The poor man left limping and the old woman was ready again to wait for God. The day passed, hour after hour. Evening came and God did not show up. The old woman was deeply disappointed. In the end she made up her mind to go to bed. Strangely she fell asleep right away and began to dream. The good Lord appeared to her in a dream and said to her: "Today, I came to visit you three times, and three times you did receive me."

*After a moment of silence for personal reflection, a song could be sung.
The prayer follows.*

*Blessed are you, Virgin Mary,
model of charity and maternal love,
for all those who seek consolation.
Blessed because you have joined each of us
to the redemptive suffering of Christ Crucified,
and you have called us to serve those who suffer.
Blessed are you, because you teach us to love the poor,
the humble, the sinners, as God loves them.
Mary, Immaculate Mother of God and of men,
hear the prayers of the sick, hear our pleas,
give the world Jesus, our true peace.*

(St. John Paul II)

SECOND STATIO

Becoming Rich in Christ

Let us listen to the Word of God from the Second Letter of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians [8:7.9.13-15]

«Now as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in utmost eagerness, and in our love for you—so we want you to excel also in this generous undertaking.

For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich. I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance. As it is written, “The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little”».

After the Scripture reading is finished, another testimony could be given, perhaps from among people who have encountered God in their difficulty. If such a testimony is not possible among the participants, testimonies already present in various books or available on the web could be used.

As an alternative, the following texts could be used for community reflection.

From Sermon 36 of Saint Augustine

He became poor though he was rich. He took on poverty without losing riches. Inwardly rich, outwardly poor. Unseen as God in his riches, visible as man in his poverty. Observe his riches. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God. This was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him (Jn 1:1-3). What could be richer than he through whom all things were made. A rich man can possess gold, but he can't create it. These riches of his having thus been declared, now observe his poverty. And the word became flesh and dwelt among us (Jn 1:14). It is by this poverty of his that we have been enriched, because by his blood that flowed from his flesh,

the flesh the Word became in order to dwell among us, the sacking of our sins was torn up. Through that blood we have cast off the rags of iniquity in order to clothe ourselves in robes of immortality.

From the Message of Pope Francis for Lent 2014

«O The Apostle was writing to the Christians of Corinth to encourage them to be generous in helping the faithful in Jerusalem who were in need. What do these words of Saint Paul mean for us Christians today? What does this invitation to poverty, a life of evangelical poverty, mean for us today? First of all, it shows us how God works. He does not reveal himself cloaked in worldly power and wealth but rather in weakness and poverty: “though He was rich, yet for your sake he became poor ...”. Christ, the eternal Son of God, one with the Father in power and glory, chose to be poor; he came amongst us and drew near to each of us; he set aside his glory and emptied himself so that he could be like us in all things (cf. Phil 2:7; Heb 4:15). God’s becoming man is a great mystery! But the reason for all this is his love, a love which is grace, generosity, a desire to draw near, a love which does not hesitate to offer itself in sacrifice for the beloved. Charity, love, is sharing with the one we love in all things. Love makes us similar, it creates equality, it breaks down walls and eliminates distances. God did this with us. Indeed, Jesus “worked with human hands, thought with a human mind, acted by human choice and loved with a human heart. Born of the Virgin Mary, he truly became one of us, like us in all things except sin.” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 22).

By making himself poor, Jesus did not seek poverty for its own sake but, as Saint Paul says “that by his poverty you might become rich”. This is no mere play on words or a catch phrase. Rather, it sums up God’s logic, the logic of love, the logic of the incarnation and the cross. God did not let our salvation drop down from heaven, like someone who gives alms from their abundance out of a sense of altruism and piety. Christ’s love is different! When Jesus stepped into the waters of the Jordan and was baptized by John the Baptist, he did so not because he was in need of repentance, or conversion; he did it to be among people who need forgiveness, among us sinners, and to take upon

himself the burden of our sins. In this way he chose to comfort us, to save us, to free us from our misery. It is striking that the Apostle states that we were set free, not by Christ's riches but by his poverty. (...)

So, what is this poverty by which Christ frees us and enriches us? It is his way of loving us, his way of being our neighbor, just as the Good Samaritan was neighbor to the man left half dead by the side of the road (cf. Lk 10:25ff). What gives us true freedom, true salvation and true happiness is the compassion, tenderness and solidarity of his love. Christ's poverty which enriches us is his taking flesh and bearing our weaknesses and sins as an expression of God's infinite mercy to us. Christ's poverty is the greatest treasure of all: Jesus' wealth is that of his boundless confidence in God the Father, his constant trust, his desire always and only to do the Father's will and give glory to him. Jesus is rich in the same way as a child who feels loved and who loves its parents, without doubting their love and tenderness for an instant. Jesus' wealth lies in his being the Son; his unique relationship with the Father is the sovereign prerogative of this Messiah who is poor. When Jesus asks us to take up his "yoke which is easy", he asks us to be enriched by his "poverty which is rich" and his "richness which is poor", to share his filial and fraternal Spirit, to become sons and daughters in the Son, brothers and sisters in the firstborn brother (cf. Rm 8:29).

After a moment of silence for personal reflection a song could be sung

Then, the following prayer can be recited:

Lord, teach us not to love ourselves, not to love only our loved ones, not to love only those who love us.

Teach us to think of others, to love first of all those whom no one loves.

Grant us the grace to understand that at every moment while we live a life that is very happy, there are millions of human beings who are also your children and our brothers and sisters, that die

of hunger without having deserved to die of hunger, who die of cold without having deserved to die of cold.

Lord, have mercy on all the poor of the world.

And don't let us any longer, O Lord, live happily alone.

Let us feel the anguish of universal misery, and deliver us from our selfishness. Amen.

(Raoul Follereau)

The presider summarizes the message, emphasizing on the one hand, the recurring theme and, on the other, the service that those present carry out in favor of the poor. A community prayer of intercession could be included here, said by the presider or by a member of the faithful, and directed to the various situations in which the poor live.

At the conclusion of the vigil all those present renew their commitment to serve the needy according to God's will.

The presider introduces with these or similar words:

Dear brothers and sisters, let us now renew our commitment to devote ourselves with greater awareness and generosity to the service of those in need. Let us say together:

All standing says one of the following prayers:

Make us worthy, Lord, to serve our brothers and sisters throughout the world who live and die in poverty and hunger.

Through our hands give them this day their daily bread, and, through our understanding love, grant them peace and joy. Amen.

(St. Paul VI)

Dear Lord,

help me to spread Your fragrance wherever I go.
Flood my soul with Your Spirit and Life.
Penetrate and possess my whole being,
so utterly that all my life may
only be a radiance of yours.
Shine through me, and be so in me,
that every soul I come in contact with
may feel Your presence in my soul.
Let them look up and see longer me, but only you, O Lord!
Stay with me, and then I will begin to shine as you do;
so to shine as to be a light to others.
The light, O Lord, will be all from You; none of it will be mine.
It will be You shining on others through me.
Let me thus praise You in the way which you love best,
by shining on those around me.
Let me preach you without preaching,
not by words but by example, by the catching force,
the sympathetic influence of what I do,
the evident fullness of the love
my heart bears to You. Amen.

(S. John Henry Newman)

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:

where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.

O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek

to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.
Amen.

(Prayer erroneously attributed to St. Francis of Assisi)

The presider ends the vigil with the blessing of the Blessed Sacrament as per rite.

PRAYER OF THE OUR FATHER

Presider:

Brothers and sisters, the words of the Lord remind us that beside us there are always people in need, with whom we must mutually share our daily bread. So that we may never forget their presence, let us invoke God and say together:

*Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come.
Thy will be done
on earth, as it is in heaven.*

*Give us this day
our daily bread,
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us,
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil. Amen.*

Prayer

Presider:

Let us pray. O God, Father of orphans and widows, refuge for foreigners, justice for the oppressed, sustain the hope of the poor who trust in your love, so that freedom and the bread you provide may never be lacking, and that we may all learn to give after the example of the One who gave himself, Jesus Christ our Lord. He is God, and lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Blessing

The presider with hands stretched over the assembly says:

O God our Father, your mercy is without limit, sustain these your children so that, guided by your Word, they may never stray from the path of love that passes through the hearts of their brothers and sisters marked by need and suffering. May your Spirit give them the strength, courage and tenacity to recognize your presence in all those who are in need. Through Christ our Lord. Amen. **Amen.**

And the blessing of Almighty God,
Father and Son ✠ and Holy Spirit
descend upon you and remain with you forever. **Amen.**

P. Let us bless the Lord.

R. Let us give thanks to God.

Or it is possible to continue with the Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament.

EXPOSITION OF THE BLESSED SACRAMENT AND ADORATION

While exposing the Blessed Sacrament the following hymn is sung or another suitable one:

Adoro te devote

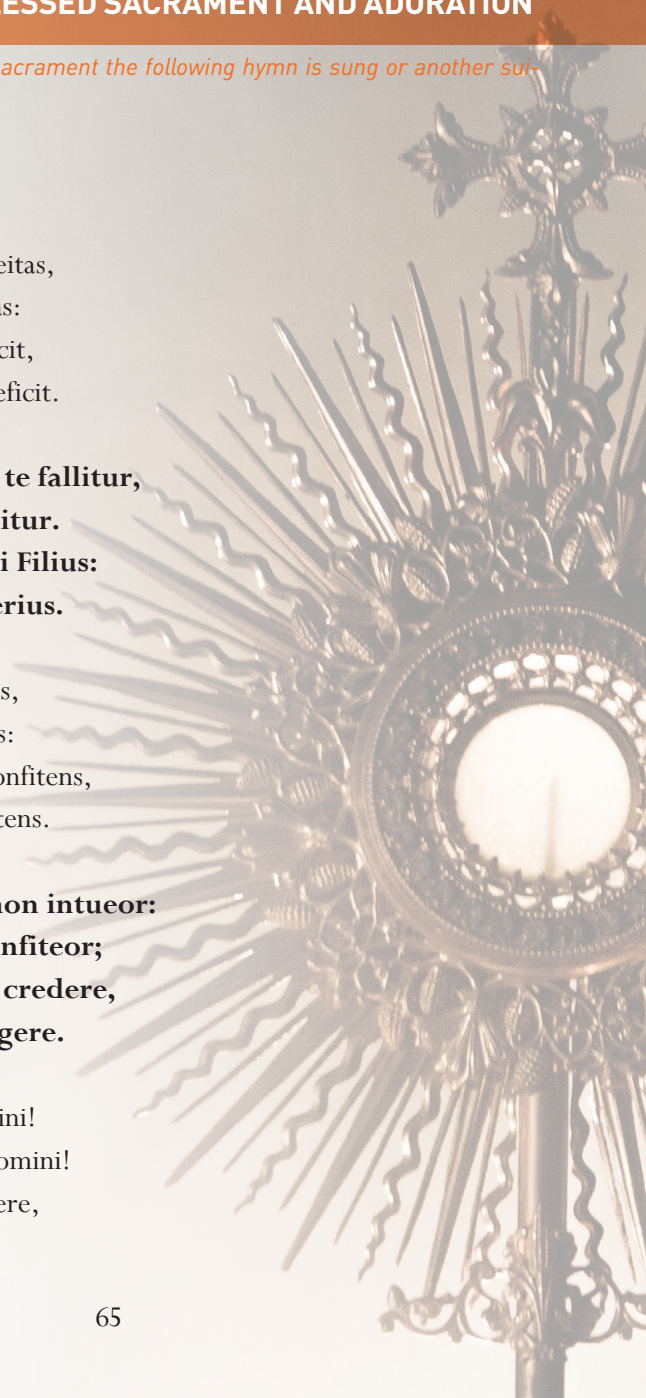
1. Adoro te devote, latens Deitas,
quae sub his figuris vere latitas:
tibi se cor meum totum subiicit,
quia te contemplans totum deficit.

2. **Visus, tactus, gustus in te fallitur,
sed auditu solo tuto creditur.**
**Credo quidquid dixit Dei Filius:
nil hoc verbo Veritatis verius.**

3. In Cruce latebat sola Deitas,
at hic latet simul et humanitas:
ambo tamen credens atque confitens,
peto quod petivit latro poenitens.

4. **Plagas, sicut Thomas, non intueor:**
Deum tamen meum te confiteor;
fac me tibi semper magis credere,
in te spem habere, te diligere.

5. O memoriale mortis Domini!
Panis vivus vitam praestans homini!
Praesta meae menti de te vivere,
et te illi semper dulce sapere.



6. Pie pellicane, Iesu Domine!

**Me immundum munda tuo Sanguine:
cuius una stilla salvum facere
totum mundum quit ab omni scelere.**

7. Iesu, quem velatum nunc aspicio,
oro fiat illud quod tam sitio:
ut te revelata cernens facie,
visu sim beatus tuae gloriae. Amen.

Silence for adoration and personal prayer.

LITANY

True God and true man, truly present in this Holy Sacrament.

We adore you, Lord.

Our Savior, God-with-us, faithful and rich in mercy.

We adore you, Lord.

King and Lord of creation and history.

We adore you, Lord.

Victor over sin and death.

We adore you, Lord.

Friend of man, risen and alive at the right hand of the Father.

We adore you, Lord.

The only begotten son of the Father, who came down from Heaven for our salvation.

We believe in you, O Lord.

Heavenly Physician, who stoops down over our misery.

We believe in you, O Lord.

Sacrificial lamb, offered to redeem us from evil.

We believe in you, O Lord.

Good Shepherd, who gives his life for the flock he loves.

We believe in you, O Lord.

Living bread and medicine of immortality, which gives us Eternal Life.

We believe in you, O Lord.

From the power of Satan and the seductions of the world.

Deliver us, O Lord.

From the pride and conceit of being able to do without you.

Deliver us, O Lord.

From the deceptions of fear and anguish.

Deliver us, O Lord.

From disbelief and despair.

Deliver us, O Lord.

From hardness of heart and the inability to love.

Deliver us, O Lord.

From all the evils that afflict humanity.

Save us, O Lord.

From hunger, famine and selfishness.

Save us, O Lord.

From disease, epidemics and fear of our brother and sister.

Save us, O Lord.

From devastating madness, ruthless interests and violence.

Save us, O Lord.

From deception, from bad information and from the manipulation of consciences.

Save us, O Lord.

Watch over your Church, as it crosses the desert.

Console us, O Lord.

Watch over humanity, terrified by fear and anguish.

Console us, O Lord.

Watch over the sick and the dying, oppressed by loneliness.

Console us, O Lord.

Watch over the doctors and health workers, exhausted by fatigue.

Console us, O Lord.

Watch over politicians and administrators, who carry the weight of their decisions.

Console us, O Lord.

In the hour of trial and loss.

Give us your Spirit, Lord.

In temptation and fragility.

Give us your Spirit, Lord.

In the fight against evil and sin.

Give us your Spirit, Lord.

In the pursuit of true good and true joy.

Give us your Spirit, Lord.

In the decision to remain in you and in your friendship.

Give us your Spirit, Lord.

If sin oppresses us.

Open us to hope, Lord.

If hatred closes our hearts.

Open us to hope, Lord.

If pain visits us.

Open us to hope, Lord.

If indifference anguishes us.

Open us to hope, Lord.

If death annihilates us.

Open us to hope, Lord.

At the end of a Eucharistic hymn, there is a brief time of silence for personal prayer.

EUCCHARISTIC BENEDICTION

Tantum ergo

1. Tantum ergo sacramentum
veneremur cernui,
et antiquum documentum
novo cedat ritui;
praestet fides supplementum
sensum defectui.

2. **Genitori Genitoque
Laus et iubilatio,
salus, honor, virtus quoque
sit et benedictio;
procedenti ab utroque
compar sit laudatio. Amen.**

Prayer

Presider:

Let us pray.
Lord Jesus Christ, you gave us
the Eucharist as the memorial of your
suffering and death. May our worship of
this sacrament of your body and blood
help us to experience the salvation you won
for us and the peace of the kingdom where
you live with the Father and the Holy Spirit,
One God, forever and ever.

R/. Amém.

The Presider blesses the assembly with the Blessed Sacrament.

Acclamations

The choir intones and the assembly repeats:

- 1. Blessed be God.**
- 2. Blessed be His Holy Name.**
- 3. Blessed be Jesus Christ, true God and true Man.**
- 4. Blessed be the Name of Jesus.**
- 5. Blessed be His Most Sacred Heart.**
- 6. Blessed be His Most Precious Blood.**
- 7. Blessed be Jesus in the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar.**
- 8. Blessed be the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete.**
- 9. Blessed be the great Mother of God, Mary most Holy.**
- 10. Blessed be her Holy and Immaculate Conception.**
- 11. Blessed be her Glorious Assumption.**
- 12. Blessed be the name of Mary, Virgin and Mother.**
- 13. Blessed be St. Joseph, her most chaste spouse.**
- 14. Blessed be God in His Angels and in His Saints. Amen.**

While the Blessed Sacrament is being reposed a song is sung.

Song of Reposition (Psalm 117)

1. Laudate Dominum, omnes gentes;
laudate eum, omnes populi.

2. **Quoniam confirmata est
super nos misericordia eius,
et veritas Domini
manet in aeternum.**

3. Gloria Patri et Filio,
et Spiritui Sancto.

4. **Sicut erat in principio,
et nunc, et semper,
et in saecula saeculorum. Amen.**

MARIAN ANTIPHON

Salve, Regina

Salve, Regina,
Mater misericordiae,
vita, dulcedo et spes nostra, salve.
Ad te clamamus, exsules filii Hevae.
Ad te suspiramus gementes et flentes
in hac lacrimarum valle.
Eia ergo, advocata nostra,
illos tuos misericordes
oculos ad nos converte.
Et Iesum,
benedictum fructum ventris tui,
nobis, post hoc exilium, ostende.
O clemens, o pia,
o dulcis Virgo Maria!

Presider:

Pray for us Holy Mother of God.

R/. So that we are worthy of reaching the divine graces and promises of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.



ROSARY OF THE POOR

THE POOR YOU WILL ALWAYS HAVE WITH YOU

How do you recite the Rosary?

P. In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

T. Amen.

P. O God come to my assistance.

T. Lord, make haste to help me.

P. Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.

T. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

For each decade, the "mystery" is stated, for example, in the first mystery we contemplate: "The Annunciation of the Angel to Mary".

After a brief pause for reflection, recite: An Our Father, ten Hail Marys and a Glory be.

At the beginning of each decade of the Rosary an invocation and a prayer can be added; in this Rosary these are taken from the Novena to Our Lady of the Poor by Banneux. At the end of the Rosary, Litanies are prayed or other Marian prayers.

Introduction

From the Message of Pope Francis for the Fifth World Day of the Poor (n. 4)

«We need, then, wholeheartedly to follow the Lord's invitation to "repent and believe in the Gospel" (Mk 1:15). This conversion consists primarily in opening our hearts to recognizing the many different forms of poverty and manifesting the Kingdom of God through a lifestyle consistent with the faith we profess».

P. In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

T. Amen.

P. O God come to my assistance.

T. Lord, make haste to help me.

P. Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.

T. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

FIRST MYSTERY

You, Lord, are my only good

«For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing. You do not realize that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked» (Rev 3:17).

Let us listen to the Word of God from the Book of Proverbs (30:7-9)

«Two things I ask of you; do not deny them to me before I die: Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that I need, or I shall be full, and deny you, and say, "Who is the Lord?" or I shall be poor, and steal, and profane the name of my God».

From the Message of Pope Francis for the Fifth World Day of the Poor (n. 2)

«The face of God revealed by Jesus is that of a Father concerned for and close to the poor. In everything, Jesus teaches that poverty is not the result of fate, but a concrete sign pointing to his presence among us. We do not find him when and where we want, but see him in the lives of the poor, in their sufferings and needs, in the often inhuman conditions in which they are forced to live. As I never tire of repeating, the poor are true evangelizers, for they were the first to be evangelized and called to share in the Lord's joy and his kingdom (cf. Mt 5:3)».

Our Father, 10 Hail Marys, Glory be...

O Mary, Mother of the Poor. Pray for us.

P. Let us pray. Virgin of the Poor, accompany us to Jesus, the only source of grace and teach us docility to the Holy Spirit, so that the fire of love that came to bring about the advent of his Kingdom may flare up. Through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Or: Virgin Mary, light of those who walk in darkness, bolster the steps of those whose dignity is exploited and mortified, so that they can live in the certainty that God is not indifferent to the fate of his children. Through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

SECOND MYSTERY

I seek you Lord, my hope

«Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, who do his commands; seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you may be hidden on the day of the Lord's wrath» (*Zeph 2:3*).

Let us listen to the Word of God from the Book of Sirach (4:1-4.8)

«My son, deprive not the poor of his living, and do not keep needy eyes waiting. Do not grieve the one who is hungry, nor anger a man in want. Do not add to the troubles of an angry mind, nor delay your gift to a beggar. Do not reject an afflicted suppliant, nor turn your face away from the poor. Incline your ear to the poor, and answer him peaceably and gently».

From the Message of Pope Francis for the Fifth World Day of the Poor (n. 3)

«Jesus not only sides with the poor; he also shares their lot. This is a powerful lesson for his disciples in every age. This is the meaning of his observation that “the poor you will always have with you”. The poor will always be with us, yet that should not make us indifferent, but summon us instead to a mutual sharing of life that does not allow proxies. The poor are not people “outside” our communities, but brothers and sisters whose sufferings we should share, in an effort to alleviate their difficulties and marginalization, restore their lost dignity and ensure their necessary social inclusion».

Our Father, 10 Hail Marys, Glory be...

O Mary, Mother of the Poor. Pray for us.

P. Let us pray. Virgin of the Poor, who said: “Believe in me, I will believe in you”, we thank you for giving us your trust. Make us capable of making choices in conformity with the Gospel, help us manage our freedom in mutual service and in the love of Christ for the glory of the Father. **Amen.**

Or: Virgin Mary, support of those who hope in you, keep in your heart all those who are forced to leave their homeland, so that they may find acceptance in the solidarity of their brothers. Through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

THIRD MYSTERY

Raise me up Lord, do not abandon me

«He raises the poor from the dust, and lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make them sit with princes, with the princes of his people» (Ps 113:7-8).

Let us listen to the Word of God from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah (14:30.32)

«And the first-born of the poor will feed, and the needy lie down in safety; The Lord has founded Zion, and in her the afflicted of his people find refuge».

From the Message of Pope Francis for the Fifth World Day of the Poor (n. 9)

«We cannot wait for the poor to knock on our door; we need urgently to reach them in their homes, in hospitals and nursing homes, on the streets and in the dark corners where they sometimes hide, in shelters and reception centers... It is important to understand how they feel, what they are experiencing and what their hearts desire. [...] The poor are present in our midst. How evangelical it would be if we could say with all truth: we too are poor, because only in this way will we truly be able to recognize them, to make them part of our lives and an instrument of our salvation».

Our Father, 10 Hail Marys, Glory be...

O Mary, Mother of the Poor. Pray for us.

P. Let us pray. Virgin of the Poor, save the nations: help us to be guided by wise leaders and obtain for us the grace that all peoples be reconciled and be in agreement in order to be one fold under one shepherd. Through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Or: Virgin Mary, consoler of the sick and disheartened, take care of those who live in precarious situations and marginalization, so that by trusting always in the fidelity of the Lord their hearts can be reopened to hope. Through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

FOURTH MYSTERY

Make me Lord, a witness of the joy of the Gospel

«The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted; he has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound» (*Is 61:1*).

Let us listen to the Word of the Lord from the Gospel according to Luke (6:20-23)

«Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you that hunger now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you that weep now, for you shall laugh. Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you and revile you, and cast out your name as evil, on account of the Son of man! Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven».

From the Message of Pope Francis for the Fifth World Day of the Poor (n. 2)

«The *poor*, always and everywhere, *evangelize us*, because they enable us to discover in new ways the true face of the Father. “They have much to teach us. Besides participating in the *sensus fidei*, they know the suffering Christ through their own sufferings. It is necessary that we all let ourselves be evangelized by them. The new evangelization is an invitation to recognize the salvific power of their lives and to place them at the center of the Church’s journey. We are called to discover Christ in them, to lend them our voice in their causes, but also to be their friends, to listen to them, to understand them and to welcome the mysterious wisdom that God wants to communicate to us through them” (Ap Exhort *Evangelii gaudium*, 198)».

Our Father, 10 Hail Marys, Glory be...

O Mary, Mother of the Poor. Pray for us.

P. Let us pray. Virgin of the Poor, comfort the sick with your presence; teach us to carry our daily cross with Jesus and help us commit ourselves to the service of the poor and the suffering. **Amen.**

Or: Virgin Mary, heart open and ready to welcome the hungry and those who hunger and thirst for justice, we present our brothers and sisters who are exploited and humiliated: make us attentive to their needs and willing to accompany them. Through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

FIFTH MYSTERY

Lord, help me to live in communion with You and our brothers and sisters

«Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet; and distribution was made to each as any had need» (*Act 4:32-35*).

Let us Listen to the Word of God from the Gospel according to Matthew (25:34-36)

«Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me».

From the Message of Pope Francis for the Fifth World Day of the Poor (n. 3)

«On the other hand, as we know, acts of charity presuppose a giver and a receiver, whereas mutual sharing generates fraternity. Almsgiving is occasional; mutual sharing, on the other hand, is enduring. The former risks gratifying those who perform it and can prove demeaning for those who receive».

ve it; the latter strengthens solidarity and lays the necessary foundations for achieving justice. In short, believers, when they want to see Jesus in person and touch him with their hands, know where to turn. The poor are a sacrament of Christ; they represent his person and point to him».

Our Father, 10 Hail Marys, Glory be...

O Mary, Mother of the Poor. Pray for us.

P. Let us pray. Virgin of the Poor, we believe in you and, trusting in your motherly intercession, we abandon ourselves to your protection. We entrust to you the path that the Church is taking in this third millennium, the moral and spiritual growth of young people, religious, priestly and missionary vocations and the work of the new evangelization. **Amen.**

Or: Virgin Mary, welcoming womb of one who lives in solitude and abandonment, do not allow any of your children to suffer from lack of warmth and friendship but find brothers and sisters willing to welcome them and offer them a friendly word. Through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Hail, Holy Queen

Mother of mercy,
our life, our sweetness and our hope.
To thee do we cry,
poor banished children of Eve:
to thee do we send up our sighs,
mourning and weeping in this vale of tears.
Turn then, most gracious Advocate,
thine eyes of mercy toward us,
and after this our exile,
show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus,
O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary!

Gospel Litanies (Mt 5:1-12)

Mary, Mother of the poor in spirit,	pray for us.
Mary Mother of the afflicted,	pray for us.
Mary Mother of the meek,	pray for us.
Mary Mother of all who hunger and thirst for justice,	pray for us.
Mary Mother of the merciful,	pray for us.
Mary Mother of the pure in heart,	pray for us.
Mary Mother of peacemakers,	pray for us.
Mary Mother of the persecuted,	pray for us.

P. Let us pray.

Lord Jesus, our brother, we pray for the poor, for the sick, for the elderly, the excluded. For those who are hungry and have no bread, but also for those who have bread and are not hungry. For those who see themselves being overtaken by everyone, for the exploited, alcoholics, prostitutes. For those who are lonely, for those who are weary. Free believers, O Lord, from thinking that a charitable act is enough to heal so much suffering.

We will always have the poor with us: they are the sign of our poverty as wayfarers, symbol of our disappointments, shred of our despair. We will always have them with us, indeed, within us.

O Lord, grant your people on the way the honor of seeing who has stopped along the way and of being ready to give them a hand to set them on their path again in the certainty that those who hope in you will not be disillusioned. **Amen.**

(Father Tonino Bello, Words of love)

Or: O God, our merciful Father, today many of our brothers and sisters are abandoned by their families and society. It is not for lack of bread, but for lack of love that they are abandoned and exposed to danger and death.

Father, forgive us!

We beg you that we become capable of sincerely loving the poor who do not even have the strength to beg for food, so that we may be merciful, just like you, Lord, rich in mercy. Make us capable of loving those who are abandoned and crucified, the countless Christs of this world, so that we learn to love not with words, but with deeds and in truth.

Father, convert us!

We stretch out our hands to You and towards our poor brothers and sisters. We share our bread with the hungry, bring relief to the afflicted and the sick, welcome the homeless into our homes, clothe the naked, try to be close to the poor, we touch and heal their wounds, the same wounded flesh of Jesus the Redeemer. Only in this way will our wounds, those of families and of society be healed.

Father, listen to us!

We are suffering great trials and tribulation because of the pandemic. Repenting of our past lives, recognizing that we are one humanity, that we don't save ourselves, that no one saves himself, but only by loving You and the poor is it possible to build Your kingdom on this earth.

Father, save us!

We wish to live in the love of Your Son Jesus, who shed every last drop of his precious blood on the cross to free us from suffering and eternal death, to transform this world of ours into a welcoming home where no one is abandoned, a world where everyone can love you and their neighbor as themselves.

Father, love us! Amen.

Litany of Mary Mother of the Poor

Lord, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Christ, hear us.
Christ, graciously hear us.
God the Father our creator,
God the Son, our redeemer,
God the Holy Spirit, our sanctifier,
Holy Trinity, one God,

Holy Mary,
Holy Mother of God,
Holy Virgin of virgins,
Daughter of the people of God,
Virgin of Nazareth,
Chosen from among women,
Virgin simple in heart,
Wife of Joseph the worker,
Queen of the family,
Woman of our people,
Hope of the oppressed,
Trusted by the poorest,
Virgin, Mother of Christ,
Virgin, Mother of the Church,
Virgin, Mother of men,
Mother who knows us,
Mother who listens to us,
Mother who understands us,
Virgin daughter of man,
Daughter of a pilgrim people,
Living presence in history,
Mother who knows pain,
Mother at the foot of the cross,

**Christ, hear us.
Christ, graciously hear us.
have mercy on us.
have mercy on us.
have mercy on us.
have mercy on us.**

**guide our path.
light our way.
give us your Son.
guide our path.
light our way.
give us your Son.
guide our path.
light our way.
give us your Son.
guide our path.
light our way.
give us your Son.
guide our path.
light our way.
give us your Son.
guide our path.
light our way.
give us your Son.
guide our path.
light our way.
give us your Son.
guide our path.
light our way.**

Mother for those who suffer,
Woman of joy,
Luminous Virgin,
Queen of Peace,

**give us your Son.
guide our path.
light our way.
give us your Son.**

Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world,
forgive us, O Lord.

Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world,
hear us, O Lord.

Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world,
have mercy on us.

P. Pray for us, O holy mother of God.

R. **That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.**

P. Let us pray. Heavenly Father, grant that we may praise with Mary your infinite goodness, and to always enjoy her protection, for in her you have given us a queen who is forgiving towards sinners and merciful towards the poor. Through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**





PRAYER INSPIRED
BY POPE FRANCIS' MESSAGE
FOR THE FIFTH
WORLD DAY OF THE POOR

«THE POOR YOU WILL ALWAYS
HAVE WITH YOU»

(Mk 14:7)

O Lord Jesus Christ, you are the first poor, the poorest of the poor, for you represent them all. The face of God that you reveal to us is that of a Father for the poor and close to the poor. All your work affirms that poverty is a concrete sign of your presence among us. The poor, whom we always have with us, are Your sacrament.

You ask us to recognize you in their lives, letting us be evangelized through them, so that we may rediscover solidarity and sharing.

Teach us to lend them our voice in their causes, but also to be their friends, to listen to them, to understand them and to welcome the mysterious wisdom that You want to communicate to us through them.

You call us to open our hearts to recognize the many expressions of poverty, manifesting



Your Kingdom through a lifestyle consistent with the faith we profess. If we do not recognize the poor, we betray Your teaching and cannot be Your disciples.

O Holy Spirit, love of the Father and of the Son poured into our hearts, you arouse in us a loving concern for the person of the poor, spurring us on to truly seek their good.

Give us the humility to recognize that we too are poor, because only in this way will we be able to truly recognize them and make them part of our life and an instrument of salvation.

Enlighten and strengthen the members of governments and world institutions, so that they may be committed to building a better world based on justice.

Saint Damien de Veuster, apostle to the lepers, pray for the many men and women, who in the current coronavirus pandemic are sharers in the suffering of millions of infected people. **Amen.**

PASTORAL SUGGESTIONS

for the Fifth World Day of the Poor

A glass of water: the poor are evangelizers

How do the poor evangelize us? A glass of water is not much, it is something that everyone can give and that everyone, in turn, can receive, and yet Christ made it a deed to be rewarded (cf. Mt 10:42). The poor evangelize us with a glass of water, that is, with their generosity. How many times, when visiting the homes of the poor, priests and pastoral workers are offered simply a glass of water, a cup of coffee, a piece of cake, or even lunch or dinner. The poor are the first to be generous, to serve, to offer help, to listen, to walk with those who, like them, suffer.

During this pandemic, we have seen the generosity of the poor in action. In parishes around the world, it has been the poor themselves who have volunteered to collect goods and distribute food packages to those most in need. The poor would buy two bottles of milk, one they would keep and one they would donate. The poor donated their glass of water, helped clean churches, parks, recreation areas for their neighbors' children, etc. The poor helped their neighbors and made sure no one was left alone. The poor evangelized by their deeds!

«In his *Message for this fifth World Day of the Poor*, the Holy Father Francis invites us to put into practice and believe fully in what we have seen to be authentic during this time marked by the pandemic: «The *poor*, always and everywhere, *evangelize us*, because they enable us to discover in new ways the true face of the Father» (n. 2). Picking up from the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, Pope Francis continues: «They have much to teach us. Besides participating in the *sensus fidei*, they know the suffering Christ through their own sufferings. It is necessary that we all let ourselves be evangelized by them. The new evangelization is an invitation to recognize the salvific power of their lives and to place them at the centre of the Church's journey. We are called to discover Christ in them, to lend them our voice in their causes, but

also to be their friends, to listen to them, to understand them and to welcome the mysterious wisdom that God wants to communicate to us through them» (n.2).

On this fifth *World Day of the Poor*, when we are invited to see the poor, who are and will always be with us, as «a sacrament of Christ» because they «represent his person and point to him» (n. 3), the following pastoral suggestions can be promoted in dioceses and parishes, and indeed wherever the poor are found. Let their glass of water touch our hearts and change us!

PASTORAL SUGGESTIONS

1. Ask a person with a terminal illness to write the Prayers of the Faithful for this fifth *World Day of the Poor*.
2. Invite an ex-prisoner to speak to the youth group or a diocesan meeting about his or her experience of God's mercy and forgiveness.
3. When offering food or clothing to the poor, ask them if they would like to pray and say a prayer with them, or better yet, ask them to offer a prayer on their own, letting them express their oneness with God.
4. Promote a “nobody eats alone” initiative that encourages all families to eat at least one meal together each day.
5. Have a Covid-19 survivor write a reflection on the meaning of his or her suffering and publish it in the parish bulletin or diocesan newspaper.
6. Invite single mothers (or single fathers) and their children to a special parish get-together or sponsor them for a trip to a local recreational park.
7. Invite all expectant mothers to the celebration of a Holy Mass and invite them to have their unborn children blessed.

8. Sponsor a “job fair” in your parish or diocesan center to bring together job providers and job seekers.
9. Promote a “toy drive” for children in shelters for domestic violence or for homeless people by asking children in your parish to donate toys in good condition, or unbroken or unwanted toys.
10. Ask all homebound to pray for vocations and to pray for the children who will be confirmed or receive their first communion during the upcoming year of faith formation.
11. Be sure to welcome children with autism to your parish and to increase awareness in your community about autism and the right of children with autism to pray with the entire People of God.
12. Include children with Down Syndrome to Christmas pageants.
13. Involve prisoners, the sick, and refugees in the process of consulting for the upcoming Church-wide Synod.
14. Ask contemplative and cloistered communities to pray for parishioners who are planning to get married.
15. Welcome immigrant families by recognizing their particular devotions of popular piety, such as the “Flight into Egypt” celebrated by Nigerian Catholics, the “Paso del Niño” celebrated by Ecuadorian Catholics, and the devotions around Our Lady of Guadalupe celebrated by Mexican Catholics, etc.



TESTIMONIES ON THE WORLD DAY OF THE POOR IN THE LOCAL CHURCHES

Views and ideas about poverty change depending on where you live. For the past 4 years I have been here in Chad in one of our African missions as an Alcantarine Franciscan Sister. My eyes or rather my outlook has definitely changed thanks to all that surrounds me and that concerns our work and presence here. Ours is a small diocese in the south of this country that is often forgotten about, but is still a crossroads for the great economic and political movements of the African continent. It is a small diocese of only 12 parishes that spans a territory as large as Sicily. Among the poor we help each other: this is the essence that I feel I can give and bear witness to. Among the poor, we understand each other in that we often feel part of a life that is not fair and full of contradictions, but

thanks to solidarity it becomes a grace.

During the preparations for the last *World Day of the Poor* in 2020, the entire local church committed themselves to looking within. This is a country where poverty reaches 67% of the population, and talking about the poor, it really means everyone. There were many meaningful initiatives to support: from making the large space for the Sunday liturgy cleaner and more dignified, to cleaning and painting the parish Cultural Center. Every day there are about 200 students from various high schools who are looking for an extra opportunity to study and so the Center offers a great contribution by simply having books to study in depth. The parish library has about 3000 books on different subjects, but above all, a space equipped with tables, benches and blackboards.

The young people have been busy reorganizing the various shelves and repainting the areas; the colors bring life and hope. I saw them determined, happy, and enthusiastic in making at least that a real possibility for their future. This country offers nothing for them. After Bac (high school exam) most of the students have no possibility of jobs or further study.

At the end of the work project, which lasted a few days, courageous volunteers wanted to write two sentences on the walls in front of the library that speak their great desire to be free men and women. The sentences are: Culture is the way to freedom; The difference between the possible and the impossible is determination.

Truly the poor teach so much, sometimes silence in the face of unbearable suffering, other times the courage to dare where hope seems so far away. But always blessed are those who are still able to learn from the lowliest of the world.



Sister Marilda Sportelli
Alcantarine Franciscan Sister in Chad

PAOLO COCCHERI THE VISIONARY OF VOLUNTEERING

We met again in 1993 because I had read in a Florence newspaper that a group of people went out at night to bring food and drinks to the homeless of Florence.

At the end of the article there was a call for new volunteers for this initiative, with Paolo's phone number. I called him immediately to get information and the next evening 50 of us met in St. Mark's Square to start what would later become the Florence Charity Patrol. From that day on, I have never stopped this volunteer activity, which has changed my life. I always told Paolo this even a month before his death, when we talked on the phone to say goodbye.

In the early years of our activity, Paolo would always go out with us in the evening and then leave the next day for a new city, a new train station, where he would hang up his sheet of paper asking for volunteers to join him for service to the homeless. And so more than 70 patrols were founded in Italy and 2 abroad. For all of us, Paolo was the driving force of the activity, even if he never wanted official positions, so he could be free to move where his spirit and creativity took him. He was always a volcano of ideas and projects. He would tell me: "I sow but there must someone to reap". And that's what we try to do in Florence, as do the other groups that Paolo started.

We began by distributing food and drinks to the homeless and then with other associations we were able to give home support to those who were undocumented, helping them to re-integrate into a process of social integration.

In order to avoid wasting food, we have always tried to collect unconsumed food from bars and restaurants to distribute to those who do not have enough to eat, and Paolo was always with us to show us the best way to reach a person in need. We will miss his smile, his spiritual strength, his example: Paul died in absolute poverty, but his example will live in our hearts.

Marisa Daniela Consilvio

*President of the Florence Charity
and Solidarity Patrol*



IN THE HEART OF AFRICA EVANGELIZED BY THE POOR

My name is Rossella Della Neve, I am 21 years old and I live in one of the most troubled neighborhoods of Naples: Monsanto. I was used to suffering, violence, lawlessness. But Jesus met me, removing the veil from my eyes, he touched my heart and my life making me feel loved with a love that filled me totally, healing wounds. I thought I had seen it all in my life, but I was wrong.

Last September, with my pastor Father Michele Madonna and a group of 14 young people, we went to the heart of Africa, to the Central African Republic, to the town of Bimbo, as part of a project of the World Day of the Poor. I went there thinking of helping and evangelizing. As soon as I arrived, I fell apart. I had never seen so very much poverty. There was nothing I could do but surrender and let myself be taken by the hands of these people and Jesus. Those I wanted to help helped me; those I wanted to evangelize evangelized me.

They had nothing, but they had the joy and happiness that no one could steal. They taught me trust in God and the beauty of faith, I saw that God is everything to them and I saw priests, nuns and lay people giving their lives day by day serving and loving like Jesus. And I realized that I am the real poor one.

Rossella della Neve

Parish of Santa Maria a Montesanto (Naples)







**The poor you will
always have with you**

2021

LOGO OF THE WORLD DAY OF THE POOR

A The logo of the *World Day of the Poor* expresses mutuality. There is an open door with two people on the threshold. Both are holding out a hand; one who is asking for help, the other who is offering help. Actually, it is difficult to tell which of the two is really the poor one. Or better yet, both are poor. The one stretching out a hand to enter is asking for

help; the one stretching out a hand to help is invited to go out to share. The two outstretched hands that meet are each offering something. Two arms express solidarity and urge us not to stay on the threshold, but to go and meet the other. The poor can come into the home once it is understood that the help is the sharing.

«The poor you will always have with you» (Mk 14:7). This is an invitation to never lose sight of the opportunity offered to us to do good, ensuring that Pope Francis' wish is realized and that the *World Day of the Poor* will grow in our local Churches and inspire a movement of evangelization that meets the poor wherever they may be.

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**The poor you will
always have with you**

2021

*The poor are present in our midst.
How evangelical it would be
if we could say with all truth:
we too are poor,
because only in this way
will we truly be able
to recognize them,
to make them part of our lives
and an instrument of our salvation.*

Francisco

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