



Bringing Home the Word

Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time | September 16, 2018

Discovering Gifts From the Poor

By Mary Katharine Deeley

The undergraduate students with whom I work are part of a generation whose opportunities to serve others began in grade school. Regardless of religious affiliation, culture, or race, these students raised money, contributed to canned food drives, helped at food pantries, or built houses with their classmates or fellow club members. Now in college, they have hundreds of opportunities to help those less fortunate who are sponsored by this nonreligious institution alone, let alone the many more offered by their respective religious houses and communities.

For the most part, they serve willingly, even eagerly. But I find that few of them sit down to reflect on the good work they do. They rarely consider the call to solidarity with the poor or the command of Christ to love one another. They just have a felt sense that they should.

For Catholics, as for all Christians, this felt sense has its roots in the faith we proclaim. If we truly believe that Christ is the Son of God and our Savior, our faith compels us to do what he did and to love as he loved. And it is more than that. Many people do service work because it's the right thing to do or because they want to give back. Those are good reasons. But we are called to be in a relationship of love with those we serve. We are challenged to see not only how we might serve them but to see the gifts they bring to us and how they shape our lives. We are called to accept them as our brothers and sisters. +

Sunday Readings

Isaiah 50:5–9a

The Lord GOD is my help,
therefore I am not disgraced.

James 2:14–18

What good is it, my brothers,
if someone says he has faith
but does not have works?
Can that faith save him?

Mark 8:27–35

[Jesus said,] "You are thinking
not as God does, but as human
beings do."

*If we truly believe
that Christ is our Savior,
then our faith compels us
to love as he loved.*

A Word From Pope Francis

[Jesus said,] "If anyone wants to come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow me." This is not an ornamental cross or an ideological cross, but it is the cross of life, the cross of one's duty, the cross of making sacrifices for others with love.

—Angelus, June 19, 2016



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Do I seize opportunities to do service work?
- When serving the less fortunate, am I willing to accept them as my brothers and sisters?



The Wisdom of the Poor

By Donald Senior, CP

Blessed are you who are poor, for the kingdom of God is yours (Luke 6:20).

Jesus' words have punch, and this beatitude from Luke's Gospel is a good example. Unlike the version in Matthew 5:3 ("Blessed are the poor in spirit..."), in Luke's Gospel Jesus speaks directly to the poor, adding no qualifying phrase like "in spirit." The people addressed here are the real poor, without resources, and truly needy.

Why would Jesus tell poor people they are blessed? The unemployed, those threatened with eviction from their home, those with no food for their hungry children all might be enraged to hear someone say, "Don't worry, you are blessed to be suffering." Advocates for the poor have long criticized those who pat poor people on the head and say, in effect, "Hang on. God loves you and your reward in heaven will be great."

Luke's Gospel makes clear that Jesus' response to the poor was more than empty words. He was a healer who waded into the sea of broken humanity to heal bodies and spirits. He threw his lot with the poor, eating with them and welcoming them (15:1-2).

Right after the beatitudes in Luke's Gospel come the "woes." The first of these pulls no punches for those who had resources, yet refused to share them: "Woe to you who are rich, for you have

received your consolation" (Luke 6:24). Jesus' words were so provocative that he earned the anger of his opponents and put his life at risk.

Ultimate Vindication

So Jesus' blessings to the poor were not idle words. He believed the poor are truly blessed because, despite everything, God cares for the poor and would ultimately vindicate their suffering. This is a fundamental conviction of the Bible. The God of Israel, the God of Jesus is on the side of the defenseless and those without resources. And while Jesus worked hard to alleviate suffering, he also firmly believed that those crushed by poverty would, in God's realm, be lifted up and filled with abundant life. For Jesus this was not "pie in the sky, by and by" but an expression of his trust that God was faithful and that life extended beyond the realm of suffering and death.

But there was another reason why Jesus blessed the poor. Those who are poor embody a truth that the rest of us often forget. The poor know what it means to be dependent on others. They know firsthand how fragile life can be, and have no illusion about being in control of their destiny. These realities apply not just to the poor but to everyone, yet having a

lot of resources can sometimes delude us into thinking we are the masters of our own destiny and do not need others.

Hard-won Wisdom

The Bible appreciates the hard-won wisdom of the poor and knows too well the illusions that can befall the rich. That is another reason why Jesus blesses the poor—paradoxically, their dependence and lack of autonomy reveal how everyone ultimately stands before God.

It's hard to read anything nowadays without thinking of the terrible crises gripping the world. How should we read Jesus' words about the poor now? Surely we are more aware of the growing chasm between the "haves" and "have-nots" that creates so much enmity and suffering.

Jesus' words and actions remind us that God cares for the poor and that as Christians we have an obligation to share our resources with those in need. All of us are "poor" before God and depend on God's abundant and gracious mercy for our lives. +



Lord, I am grateful for the gift of faith. Help me to practice what I believe in my heart.

From Grateful Meditations for Every Day in Ordinary Time, Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

September 17-22

Monday, Weekday:
1 Cor 11:17-26, 33 / Lk 7:1-10

Tuesday, Weekday:
1 Cor 12:12-14, 27-31a / Lk 7:11-17

Wednesday, Weekday:
1 Cor 12:31-13:13 / Lk 7:31-35

Thursday, Sts. Andrew Kim Tae-gŏn,
Paul Chŏng Ha-sang, and Companions:
1 Cor 15:1-11 / Lk 7:36-50

Friday, St. Matthew: Eph 4:1-7, 11-13 / Mt 9:9-13

Saturday, Weekday:
1 Cor 15:35-37, 42-49 / Lk 8:4-15