



“The poor you will always have with you” (Mk 14:7)

Pope Francis Message for the 5th world day of the poor, 2021.



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We are called to discover Christ in them, to lend them our voice in their causes, to be their friends, to listen, 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 programmes of promotion and assistance; but above all an attentiveness that considers the other in a certain sense as one with ourselves.

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), and they enable us to discover in new ways the true face of the Father. It is necessary that we all let ourselves be evangelized by them.

Jesus not only sides with the poor; he also shares their lot. This is the meaning of his observation that “the poor you will always have with you”. 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.

The poor are a sacrament of Christ; they represent his person and point to him.

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



Of the many saints who lived this mutual sharing with the poor, is St. Damien of Molokai, who died of Hansen's disease in 1889 after spending the last 16 years of his life caring for people with the disease, who were permanently quarantined in Kalaupapa on the Hawaiian island of Molokai. "His testimony is most timely in our own days, marked by the coronavirus pandemic. God's grace is at work in "all those who, without fanfare, spend themselves for the poorest, sharing with them in concrete ways."



St. Damien of Molokai

Feastday: May 10
Patron: of people with leprosy
Birth: 1840
Death: 1889
Beatified: June 4th, 1995, by Pope John Paul II
Canonized: October 11th, 2009, Vatican City, by Pope Benedict XVI

We need, then, wholeheartedly to follow the Lord's invitation to “repent and believe in the Gospel” (Mk 1:15), by opening our hearts to recognize the many different forms of poverty and manifesting the Kingdom of God through a lifestyle consistent with the faith we profess. Christian discipleship 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). 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.

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 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, have shown are, together with far-sighted projects of human promotion, making a most important contribution at this juncture.



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.

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.

Poverty, 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. 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.

“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. “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). 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.

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 centres. 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.

FRANCISCUS

Rome, Saint John Lateran,

13 June 2021, Memorial of Saint Anthony of Padua

Each one of us longs for
love, for truth, for life -
and Jesus is all of these
things in abundance!

Pope Francis

