



Bringing Home the Word

Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)
September 5, 2021

A Church of and for the Poor

By Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

The book of James is one of the hardest hitting in the New Testament. He is a tell-it-like-it-is apostle, warning the early Church not to show partiality to the rich and powerful. This is always a danger, especially in a Church that relies on donations. While gratitude to donors is understandable and proper, it's easy for gratitude to become preference, partiality, and a different moral standard. James warns the Church against this.

Jesus warns us, too. He talks about inviting the poor to a party rather than those who can repay us. He tells us that

when we give, that the left hand should not know what the right is doing. He warns the rich that the path to heaven is narrow.

Jesus' call to salvation was for all, but his pastoral focus was certainly with the poor. So, he dedicated much of his time reaching out to those who could give nothing in return: the blind, deaf, lame, and lepers. And his attention didn't stop at the materially poor but extended to sinners and those thought to be impure.

This love for the weak was a sign of the Messiah as proclaimed by many prophets, including Isaiah. The Anointed of God would come to vindicate the poor, orphaned, widowed, sick, and oppressed.

Jesus did exactly that, and it was this solicitude and miraculous power that began convincing Galileans, and eventually those in Jerusalem, that he was the long-awaited One. Pope Francis said he longed for a Church of the poor, for the poor. It seems Jesus did, too. +

Sunday Readings

Isaiah 35:4-7a

Say to the fearful of heart:
Be strong, do not fear!
Here is your God.

James 2:1-5

My brothers and sisters, show no partiality as you adhere to the faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ.

Mark 7:31-37

And [immediately] the man's ears were opened, his speech impediment was removed, and he spoke plainly.

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is understandable,
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A Word from Pope Francis

Remember that story about the poor widow lady...Her husband had committed suicide; he jumped from the bridge into the river. And she wept. She said, "I am a sinner, a poor woman. But my poor husband! He is in hell."...And the Curé of Ars said, "But wait a moment, ma'am, because between the bridge and the river, there is the mercy of God."

—Homily, March 18, 2019



REFLECTION QUESTIONS REFLECTION

- Do I have a heart for the poor as Jesus did?
- How can I express that real preference in practical ways?

Want to Be in That Number?

By Kathleen M. Basi

When I was a child, I had a book about saints that I loved. It was filled with color pictures and heroic, larger-than-life stories. I spent hours trying to decide whether I liked Catherine of Siena or Catherine of Alexandria better. I felt as if I ought to like Siena better for cutting her hair off and being a nun and all, but Alexandria's picture was prettier.

It was years before I realized most of these people weren't the golden-haired northern Europeans portrayed in my book. It was later still before I realized that by focusing on legends and miracles, I had turned sainthood into something reserved for a select few—something far beyond the reach of an ordinary mortal like me.

These days, I prefer to think of the saints as real people, flawed and fragile, representing every country and culture on earth. Yet for all their diversity, each of them sought exactly what I seek: discernment and courage to walk in the footsteps of Christ in a way that is authentic both to his example and to the time and place in which I live.

Now, my favorite stories speak not of miracles, but of extraordinary courage in ordinary situations—like Elizabeth Ann Seton, who, as an impoverished widow, founded the first parochial school in this country, along with a new order of religious—all while raising her own children.

They speak of deeply practical courage



in extraordinary circumstances—like Maximilian Kolbe, who willingly starved to death in place of a fellow concentration-camp prisoner in Auschwitz. In my opinion, that would be even harder than volunteering for a firing squad, where at least the end would come quickly.

And then there are figures with checkered pasts, like Dorothy Day and Thomas Merton—those who don't have feast days in the Church calendar but whose words and actions have reverberated like an earthquake, reshaping the foundation of my faith.

Real people. Real lives. People stumbling through their world in all its messiness, trying to find the path to holiness amid chaos and to identify their

individual purpose for why God placed them on this earth. Those people give me hope. If they managed to find their purpose, maybe I can, too.

It's no longer enough for me to read a paragraph or two about the legendary exploits of those whose names begin with "Saint." I want to know how the real people behind those legends lived. How they learned to mirror God while surrounded by cranky kids and clueless coworkers and spouses who insist on using dish towels to wipe dirty mouths. Because that is the path I need illuminated. +

Saints are real people with real lives seeking the discernment and courage to exemplify Christ.

PRAYER

Lord, I am grateful for your faithfulness. Teach me to bring the comfort of your loving presence to those who are afraid.

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

WEEKDAY READINGS

September 6–11

Monday, Weekday:
Col 1:24–2:3 / Lk 6:6–11

Tuesday, Weekday:
Col 2:6–15 / Lk 6:12–19

Wednesday, The Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary: Mi 5:1–4a or Rom 8:28–30 / Mt 1:1–16, 18–23, or 1:18–23

Thursday, St. Peter Claver:
Col 3:12–17 / Lk 6:27–38

Friday, Weekday:
1 Tm 1:1–2, 12–14 / Lk 6:39–42

Saturday, Weekday:
1 Tm 1:15–17 / Lk 6:43–49

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