

“I Recommend You My Beloved Poor...”

Magdalene of Canossa

The Mission of Jesus

At the synagogue in Nazareth, Jesus said that the Holy Spirit had anointed him

**“to preach Good News to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners,
and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed,
To proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.”**

Luke 4:18-19

Jesus’ mission is a holistic mission to the poor.

Jesus preached the Good News of the Kingdom because this is what He was sent to do (Lk 4:43). The Gospel story is full of stories of preaching, teaching, healing, and casting out of demons ... word, deed, and sign.

Jesus chose **Twelve fairly ordinary people “to be with Him”** in order He could send them to do what He had been doing: preaching, casting out demons, and healing the sick (Mk 3:13-15; 6:12). **A company of women** helped support Him “out of their own means” (Lk 8:3). Transformation is the work of a community. The Gospel message is a way of living with Christ and each other that then enables **the ministry of word, deed, and sign.**

When asked what must be done to inherit eternal life, Jesus said that the greatest Commandment was:

**“Love God
with all your heart and with all your soul and
with all your strength and with all your mind and
love your neighbour as yourself.”**

Mt 23:36

This is a commandment about relationship, about who we must love, not simply what we must believe or do. It is both our motive for helping the poor and a point of departure for what a biblical understanding of transformation means: **right and just relationships.**

Poverty is about relationships that do not work, that isolate, that abandon or devalue. We must restore relationships with God, with self, with community, with the “other”, and with the environment. Jesus emptied himself of all desire to dominate, and taking the form of a human, identified himself with the poor and suffered a criminal’s death.

After his resurrection Jesus appears to the disciples for forty days, speaking about the Kingdom and He told them:

**“Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations;
Baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you.
And know that I am with you always, to the end of time”.**

Matthew 28.20

The Church, the community of faith, continues announcing the Good News until Christ comes again. And we, members of the Mystical Body of Christ, continue His Mission in His name and love.

☪ Who are we?

This seems a simple question. Sometimes we move too quickly past it, assuming every one knows the answer. **We are human beings made in the image of God.** We all know this. What we forget sometimes is that the God in whose image we are made is the **God who is communion, the relational God.** This means that our individual self can never be itself apart from our being in communion with God and with other human beings. Our human selves are rooted in relationships, finding their fullest meaning in just and harmonious relationships or losing meaning and worth when these relationships do not work.

Every person is unique and should be aware of his or her uniqueness which, however, does not lead to selfishness but rather finds full expression in self-giving love.

The Holy Spirit empowers us for mission and leads us into mission. We must accept everyone, the non-poor as well as the poor. This is the heart of the Gospel and the beginning of transformation. We welcome people where they are without judgment. We must see the world as created, fallen, and being redeemed, all at the same time. We must not separate creation and fall from redemption. If the poor are forgotten, ignored, we are not following Christ. **If the poor are forgotten, God will be forgotten too. Love God ... love your neighbour is a single commandment.**

☪ Listen to the Voices ...

"Poverty is like living in jail, living under bondage, waiting to be free" — Jamaica

"Poverty is lack of freedom, enslaved by crushing daily burden, by depression and fear of what the future will bring." — Georgia

"If you want to do something and have no power to do it, it is talauchi (poverty)." — Nigeria

"Lack of work worries me. My children were hungry and I told them the rice is cooking, until they fell asleep from hunger." — an older man from Bedsa, Egypt.

"A better life for me is to be healthy, peaceful and live in love without hunger. Love is more than anything. Money has no value in the absence of love." — a poor older woman in Ethiopia

"When one is poor, she has no say in public, she feels inferior. She has no food, so there is famine in her house; no clothing, and no progress in her family." — a woman from Uganda

"For a poor person everything is terrible - illness, humiliation, shame. We are cripples; we are afraid of everything; we depend on everyone. No one needs us. We are like garbage that everyone wants to get rid of." — a blind woman from Tiraspol, Moldova

"I repeat that we need water as badly as we need air." — a woman from Tash-Bulak, The Kyrgyz Republic

"The waste brings some bugs; here we have cockroaches, spiders and even snakes and scorpions." — Nova California, Brazil

Poverty is much more than income alone. For the poor, the good life or wellbeing is multidimensional with both material and psychological dimensions. Wellbeing is peace of mind; it is good health; it is belonging to a community; it is safety; it is freedom of choice and action; it is a dependable livelihood and a steady source of income; it is food. The poor describe illbeing as lack of material things - food especially but also lack of work, money, shelter and clothing and living and working in often unhealthy, polluted and risky environments.

Who are the Poor?

The people who live in poverty are human beings who have names, who are made in the image of God, whose hairs are numbered, and for whom Jesus died. They are as valued, as important, as loved as those who do not. The world sees the poor as a group that is helpless and so they become nameless and we treat them as objects of our compassion, as a thing to which we can do what we believe is best.

We give them their names: homeless, destitute, working poor, and so on. We can label them: dirty, uneducated, lazy, hopeless, superstitious, ineffective, and so on. Whenever we consider poor people in this way, we add to their poverty and impoverish ourselves.

We must remember that **the poor are people with names, people to whom God has given gifts**, and people with whom and among whom God has been working before we even know they are there. **We must ask God's help to see the poor and the circumstances of the poor more truly.**

The poor are people, living people, inseparably body, soul, mind, and heart. They are persons rooted in families, communities and the corresponding social system. The Scripture tells us that the poor are made in the image of God and thus have gifts, skills and the potential to become Kingdom-like, just as we do.

The poor are always among others who are not poor. Even in the most poorest communities, there is a small group who are less poor and who occupy position of relative power.

The poor may not save for the future because their survival today will not permit it. The poor may appear lazy, but it is their way of conserving limited physical energy. The poor are no more lazy, fatalistic or arrogant than anyone else. All people suffer from these problems, poor and non-poor alike.

Children and youth are often viewed as helpless, vulnerable, and in need of care; they are simply poor and have nothing to contribute. The poor are often **women** and the poverty of women is both a special concern and a special opportunity. **Women and young girls** get less schooling, have poorer nutrition and receive less health care. The poverty of women is physical, spiritual, and social.

What can we do in the name and love of God?

☪ The Word of God

**My heart exults in the Yahweh, my horn is exalted in my God,
my mouth derides my foes, for I rejoice in your power of saving.**

**There is none as holy as Yahweh, indeed, there is no one but you,
no rock like our God.**

Do not speak and speak with haughty words, let no arrogance come from your mouth.

For Yahweh is an all-knowing God and his is the weighing of deeds.

The bow of the mighty is broken but the feeble have girded themselves with strength.

The sated hire themselves out for bread but the famished cease from labour;
the barren woman bears sevenfold, but the mother of many is desolate.

**Yahweh gives death and life, brings down to Sheol and draws up;
Yahweh makes poor and rich, he humbles and also exalts.**

He raises the poor from the dust, he lifts the needy from the dunghill
to give them a place with princes, and to assign them a seat of honour;
for to Yahweh the props of the earth belong, on them he has poised the world.

He safeguards the steps of his faithful but the wicked vanish in darkness
(for it is not by strength that man triumphs).

The enemies of Yahweh are shattered, the Most High thunders in the heavens.

**Yahweh judges the ends of the earth, he endows his king with power,
He exalts the horn of his Anointed.**

1 Samuel 2, 1-10

☪ Magdalene's Insights

- *I have always wished to place myself and all that I own at the service of God and for the benefit of the poor.*
- *I wish we were able to do everything everywhere but, being so limited, let us work at least where the need is greatest.*