



The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor (Luke 4:18)

Aug 2014: Reflection - Luke 4:14-18

The world first set eyes upon Christ while he lay peacefully in the arms of his mother, in a poor stable in Bethlehem. There was no place for him at the inn, for Joseph and Mary were not people of great power, the kind of people the world gladly makes way for. Neither were they the kind of people who would convince others to give them whatever they want by flattering or by threatening. In fact, the Holy Family was a poor family, and it was into this ordinary family that Jesus was born. He was born like every other child, except he selected his own family and birthplace, unlike any other child. It is of great significance that having every possible choice in front of him before he came into the world, Christ freely chose to be born into poor circumstances.

Thirty years later we find Jesus explaining that while "foxes have holes and birds have nests, the Son of Man has nowhere to lay down his head" (Luke 9:58). He was not poor because he did not receive support or he was incapable of earning money, but because he and his disciples gave generously to the poor and maintained for themselves a state of holy poverty for the sake of the Gospel. For, if he intentionally choose to be a poor person even before he was born, why would he choose to be anything different in his adult life? As he sends his disciples out for the mission, he tells them not to carry a money-bag for the journey. In the Gospel according to Luke, we see Christ raising his eyes to these poor disciples and saying, "blessed are you poor" (Luke 6:20). Poverty is thus intrinsically connected with the effective proclamation of the Gospel in the power of the Spirit.

Considering the crucial role poverty plays in the proclamation of the Gospel, the Church has called it “evangelical poverty” (‘evangelium’ is the Latin word for Gospel). Christ calls all of us to live *in the spirit* of evangelical poverty, since this enables us to proclaim the Gospel in the freedom that comes from being detached from possessions, the pursuit of wealth, and the love of luxury. Beyond this, Christ also calls certain men and women to be poor not only *in spirit* but also *in fact*. They are called to imitate Christ more perfectly in his manner of life and mission by becoming in some ways literally and materially poor. By a special charism of the Holy Spirit, they are able to proclaim the Gospel with freedom from wealth and possessions, to keep no distance between themselves and the poor or the outcast. They find their security only in the hands of the providence of God. Our patron saint St. Francis of Assisi is one of the most exceptional examples of evangelical poverty, so much so that Pope Pius XI wrote, “... there has never been anyone in whom the image of Jesus Christ and the evangelical manner of life shone forth more lifelike and strikingly than in St. Francis. He ... was also rightly spoken of as ‘another Jesus Christ’ ...”.

Christ came to “proclaim Good News to the poor”. As such, he had little to offer to those who felt they already had everything they needed, whether because they were wealthy or because they thought themselves very religious and righteous. But to all who suffered, all who were in sorrow for their sins, all who cried out to God in need, to these hearts he was and is very near. “Those who are well do not need a physician,” he said, “but only those who are sick” (Mark 2:17). Christ embraced poverty eagerly in order to become united with the poorest of the world. Indeed, he became poor in order to “proclaim Good News to the poor”, and we have all greatly profited from his poverty. St. Paul tells us that “though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.”

It is when the Son of Man is lifted up on the Cross that we see the lowest point of poverty. He was counted among criminals, among those who were cursed! He was rejected and hated by all, but he bore it with such meekness, for he did not betray his poverty of spirit even when they spat on him and mocked him. Like a truly poor person, he did not use great power to fight for himself, even as they taunted him saying “If you are the Son of God, save yourself!” (Mathew 27:40). He did not give a moving speech from the Cross to shame his enemies or to defend his innocence, but rather he cried out to God as a poor, genuinely suffering man, for he knew that God heard the cry of the poor. In the final moments of his life, he did not suddenly break free and display his divine power, like we might expect from the hero in a story. Rather, he surrendered his spirit, he breathed his last. The centurion, who looked on, a man endowed with earthly power, was moved by this holy sight. Never before had he seen humility shine so brightly; never had meekness appeared so divine. In his poverty, the centurion perceived something more in this man. He confessed, “Truly this man was the Son of God” (Mark 15:39).

Let us also look with awe and admiration at the poverty of Christ and at the poverty of his Cross. How right was the observation of the centurion upon seeing the Suffering Servant expire! May the poverty of Christ also move our hearts to be able to perceive in his Cross what the human eye cannot see and the human mind cannot grasp: the infinite riches of God's love and mercy.