

“We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love each other”

(1 John 3:14)



Reflection:

As we continue reflecting on the pillar ‘Option for the Poor’, we proceed from the poverty of Jesus to the Christian call to generosity. “This is the meaning of true love, to give until it hurts,” said St. Teresa of Calcutta. At the heart of generosity remains the recognition that, ‘everything I have comes from God and I have received everything not merely for myself, but also for the other’.

“What have you that you did not receive?” (1 Cor. 4:7); since, “Every good endowment and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights.” (Jam. 1:17). We can fall into the trap of thinking ourselves to be “self-made”. Yet the family and circumstances we were born into, the natural gifts we possess, the basic resources that have followed us, the health of mind and body we take for granted – none of these were things we accomplished but things we received freely. As we become “poor in spirit”, we recognize that we have nothing that we can call exclusively our own. Rather, everything we have flows freely and continuously to us from God’s providence.

Those who are poor in spirit are free to joyfully possess things as though they did not possess them at all (cf. 1 Cor. 7:29-31). They enjoy tremendous freedom and detachment from wealth and possessions, never desperately clinging to what they currently have, never anxiously striving to acquire more. As Jesus teaches his disciples, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth... do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on” (Matt. 6:19,25).

Still, one might ask why some receive the privilege of an education while millions do not? Why am I blessed with artistic talents or intellectual gifts while others around me lack these? One of the early Church Fathers, St. Ignatius of Antioch provides a brilliant response to this based on St. Paul’s image of the Church as the Body of Christ:

...let everyone be subject to his neighbour, according to the special gift bestowed upon him. Let the strong not despise the weak, and let the weak show respect unto the strong. Let the rich man provide for the wants of the poor; and let the poor man bless God, because He hath given him one by whom his need may be supplied...

Thus, the rich are given riches for the sake of the poor. And the poor are given poverty so that they might receive aid from the rich. In this way, we see that the human race is meant to become a living body, is called to be the Church, where each organ lives for the sake of the whole body. In the body, no organ ought to live for itself. St. John tells us that the new life of a Christian is marked by this essential characteristic, that we lay our lives down in love for our brother and sister in imitation of Christ and that we no longer live for ourselves. Thus, the simple answer to the question, “Why did I receive this?” becomes “Because, I am chosen by God. I am chosen for the sake of my brother and sister.”

Upon those who are chosen, a greater responsibility is laid, for “everyone to whom much is given, of him will much be required” (cf. Lk. 12:41-48). It is an honor and privilege to be blessed by God and to be chosen for others, but it is also a weighty responsibility. When we take stock of all we have received, when we consider from Whom we have received everything, then we must always go a step further to recognize for whom we have received all that we have. When we fulfill this obligation to our brother and sister, we know that we have passed from death into life, that we are a living and functional organ in Christ’s Body, and that the love of God abides in us.

 **Saint’s Quote:** “It is not from your own possessions that you are bestowing alms on the poor, you are but restoring to them what is theirs by right. For what was given to everyone for the use of all, you have taken for your exclusive use. The earth belongs not to the rich, but to everyone. Thus, far from giving lavishly, you are but paying part of your debt.” - St. Ambrose

To Do: Surprise a ‘poor’ person each week - with your time and resources!

