


Religion that is pure and undefiled
before God and the Father is this:
**to visit orphans and
widows in their affliction,
and to keep oneself unstained from
the world - James 1:27**

(For LectioDivina, Please read and reflect James 2:1-9)



 **Reflection:**


There is a beautiful story from the life of St. Francis about his encounter with a leper. He was riding on horseback near Assisi one day when he saw a leper on the street. His immediate reaction was one of horror and disgust. But as he paused and reflected on his commitment to the love of Christ, he realized that he had to overcome the repulsion and fear that distanced him from his brother. He dismounted his horse and drew near to the man. Not only did he give the leper a coin, but also a kiss. Returning onto his horse, he saw no trace of the man, whom he then realized was Jesus.

When we compare the nations of the world today we notice incredible disparities in living conditions and opportunities. But such disparities are also found within our own cities. The poor and the homeless are moved out of the educated and wealthy parts of town and into areas that we call slums, shanty towns, ghettos, etc. In many neighborhoods, the homeless are driven out when they are found sleeping somewhere. Poor families are pressured to move out of prospering areas so that their presence will not affect real estate values. As a society, we often find the poor to be an inconvenience and prefer to give our better treatment to the rich. We "say to the poor man, 'Stand there,'" while to the rich man we say, "Have a seat here, please" (Jas 2:3). By building walls between ourselves and the poor, we falsely make our own lives more convenient and less burdensome. In many places, an average well-off person — a professional, for example — does not even have to see poor people, much less interact with them. In other places, it is natural to act as though they are invisible as we walk by them. Meanwhile, the poor in many neighbourhoods are left without proper infrastructure, clean air, education, opportunities to encounter beauty (gardens, fountains, sacred art, etc.), or even good role models and mentors. Sitting high on the horse of our social class and riding along with our own errands and ambitions, how easy it is to zoom past the poor in our world!

Who are the poor around me? What walls have been built to keep them away? And what does the love of Christ urge me to do? "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction..." It is never enough to wait and hope that someday a disadvantaged person will come our way. Instead, charity compels us to be attuned to the poor and suffering and "to visit [them] in their affliction." We must break through the all-too-convenient walls of division.

St. Francis gave the man not only a coin but a kiss. A few years ago, Pope Francis challenged us saying, "When you give alms, do you touch the hand of the one to whom you give alms, or do you toss the coin?" The Option for the Poor is not just about the distribution of food and money, it is not just about efficiency. Rather, the love of Christ inspires us to come close to the affliction of our brother and sister, to love them and from that love to provide for their needs.

Let us hold before us the example of Christ. When he saw us in the misery of our sin, he did not toss a coin to us from heaven. Rather, he visited us in our affliction. He "dismounted" from the heights of divine glory in order to become a human being like us. Let us also, relying on his grace, allow the love of Christ to bring us closer to the sufferings and needs of the poor, even if simply to be present. In this way, we will live out our faith authentically, in a way that is "pure and undefiled before God."

 **Saint's quote:**

"Whereas before, not only the company but even the distant sight of lepers would fill St. Francis with violent loathing, now, for the sake of Christ Crucified... he would often visit their dwellings and bestow alms upon them, and with a deep impulse of compassion would kiss their hands and faces." - St. Bonaventure

 **To Do:**

For the sake of Christ crucified, take the initiative in your JY fellowship to practically respond to this reflection.