



Pope: The poor save us because they show us the face of Christ



Pope Francis' message for the Third World Day of the Poor was released on Thursday. The day will be observed on Sunday 17th November.

By Lydia O'Kane

The theme for this year's World Day of the Poor message is "The hope of the poor shall not perish forever", taken from the Book of Psalms.

The Pope writes that these words "express a profound truth that faith impresses above all on the hearts of the poor, restoring lost hope in the face of injustice, sufferings and the uncertainties of life."

Pope Francis points out that down through the centuries there have always been rich and poor. Today too, he adds, "we must acknowledge many new forms of bondage that enslave millions of men, women, young people and children."

In the message the Pontiff says that, on a daily basis there are families forced to leave their homeland to seek a living elsewhere; orphans who have lost their parents or were violently torn from them by brutal means of exploitation; young people seeking professional fulfilment but prevented from employment by shortsighted economic policies; victims of different kinds of violence; millions of immigrants who fall victim to any number of concealed interests. "And all the homeless and ostracized persons who roam the streets of our cities."

“How many times do we see poor people rummaging through garbage bins to retrieve what others have discarded as superfluous, in the hope of finding something to live on or to wear”, underlines the Pope.

“They themselves become part of a human garbage bin; they are treated as refuse, without the slightest sense of guilt on the part of those who are complicit in this scandal.”

The poor and Scripture

Turning his attention to Scripture, Pope Francis emphasizes how God is constantly acting in the interests of the poor. “We can never elude the urgent appeal that Scripture makes on behalf of the poor”, he says.

The Pope comments that, “the situation of the poor obliges us not to keep our distance from the body of the Lord, who suffers in them.” He continues by saying that, “instead, we are called to touch his flesh and to be personally committed in offering a service that is an authentic form of evangelization. Commitment to the promotion of the poor, including their social promotion, is not foreign to the proclamation of the Gospel. On the contrary, it manifests the realism of Christian faith and its historical validity.”

Working for the marginalized

In this World Day of the Poor message, the Pope mentions two people, who in their lives worked tirelessly for the disadvantaged. Quoting Italian priest Father Primo Mazzolari, he says, “the poor are a constant protest against our injustices; the poor are a powder keg. If it is set on fire, the world will explode”.

He also recalls the late Jean Vanier saying that, “thanks to his enthusiasm, he gathered around himself great numbers of young people, men and women, who worked daily to give love and restore a smile to many vulnerable persons, offering them a true “ark” of salvation from marginalization and solitude.”

Witnesses of hope

The Pope stresses that, “the option for those who are least, those whom society discards, is a priority that Christ’s followers are called to pursue, so as not to impugn the Church’s credibility but to give real hope to many of our vulnerable brothers and sisters.”

Pope Francis notes that, “it is not easy to be witnesses of Christian hope in the context of a consumerist culture, a culture of waste concerned only for the spread of a shallow and ephemeral wellbeing.

What is needed, he says, is a “change of mentality... in order to rediscover what is essential and to give substance and verve to the preaching of the kingdom of God.”

The Pope remarks that, although the poor are in need of things like clothing and a warm meal, what they need most of all is love. “In the heart of the pilgrim People of God there beats that saving power which excludes no one and involves everyone in a real journey pilgrimage of conversion, to recognize the poor and to love them.”

Blessed are the Poor

“God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong”, underlines Pope Francis. “The poor save us because they enable us to encounter the face of Jesus Christ.”

The Pope concludes by saying that, “if the disciples of the Lord Jesus wish to be genuine evangelizers, they must sow tangible seeds of hope. He then asks all Christian communities, and all those who feel impelled to offer hope and consolation to the poor, “to help ensure that this World Day of the Poor will encourage more and more people to cooperate effectively so that no one will feel deprived of closeness and solidarity.”