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Editorial

Poverty Is at the Heart of the Gospel

During his homily at a Mass in Casa Santa Marta on June 16, 2015, Pope Francis said the Gospel becomes incomprehensible if poverty is removed from it, and that it is unfair to label priests who show a pastoral concern for the poor as “Communists”.

In the homily he recalled how St Paul organized a collection in the Church of Corinth for the benefit of the Church of Jerusalem, whose members were facing great hardship. Pope Francis noted that, today as then, poverty is “a word that always embarrasses.” Many times, he said, we hear: “But this priest talks too much about poverty, this bishop speaks of poverty, this Christian, this nun talks about poverty ... aren’t they a little communist, right?” On the contrary, as reported by Vatican Radio, he warned, “Poverty is at the very centre of the Gospel: if we remove poverty from the Gospel, no one would be able to understand anything about the message of Jesus.”

St Paul, he said, speaking to the Church of Corinth, highlights what is their real wealth: “You are rich in everything, in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and love that we have taught you.” The exhortation of the Apostle is: “as you are rich, be you also great in this generous work in “this collection”.

“If you have so much richness in the heart, these great riches of zeal, charity, the Word of God, the knowledge of God - let this wealth reach your pockets - and this is a golden rule: when faith does not come with pockets, it is not a genuine faith. Paul tells us: ‘You are rich in many things now, so be generous in this work of generosity.’ here is this contrast between wealth and poverty. The Church of Jerusalem is poor, is in economic difficulty, but it is rich,

because it has the treasure of the Gospel message. This poor Church of Jerusalem has enriched the Church of Corinth with the Gospel message; it has given the richness of the Gospel.”

Pope Francis asks us to follow the example of the Church of Corinth. Jesus Christ, who was rich - with the very richness of God - made Himself poor, He lowered Himself for us. This, then, is the meaning of the first Beatitude: ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit,’ i.e. “to be poor is to let oneself be enriched by the poverty of Christ, to desire not to be rich with riches other than those of Christ”:

“When we give help to the poor, we are not doing the work of aid agencies ‘in a Christian way’. Those are good, it is a decent thing to do - aid work is good and quite human - but it is not Christian poverty which St. Paul desires of us and preaches to us. Christian poverty, is that I give of my own, and not of that which is left over - I give even that, which I need for myself, to the poor person, because I know that he enriches me. Why does the poor person enrich me? Because Jesus Himself told us that He is in the poor person.”

“This is the theology of poverty: This is because poverty is at the heart of the Gospel; it is not an ideology. It is precisely this mystery, the mystery of Christ who humbled Himself, who let Himself be impoverished in order to enrich us. So it is understandable why the first of the Beatitudes is ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit.’ Being poor in spirit means going on this path of the Lord: the poverty of the Lord, who lowers Himself even so far as to become bread for us.”

May we be enriched by this treasure! May we experience the heart of faith and radiate the joy and abandonment of possessing the true riches (of poverty) in abundance!

Kuruvilla Pandikattu SJ
Editor