

## THE POOR ARE NOT AT THE MARGINS OF THE CHURCH; THEY'RE AT THE CENTER

"If we wish to lead a dignified and fulfilling life, we have to reach out to others and seek their good." (Pope Francis)

Indeed, when we isolate ourselves, we lose a piece of ourselves.

Only in proximity can we understand another person. Nearness matters. Maybe I can't walk in your shoes, but I can walk alongside you, listen, learn, experience, and feel.



Pope Francis explains that the mission of Catholic social ministry is to serve, accompany, and defend the poor.

Before attempting any of these, we must first establish a close human relationship with the poor; walk alongside them. Or share a meal.

A meal – a banquet – is the setting for today's Gospel reading, where Jesus tells us that "when you hold a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind; blessed indeed will you be because of their inability to repay you."

Like yesterday, however, today's systems and structures are attuned to the voices of power. Who hears the cry of the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind? People of Faith know that **the poor are not at the margins of the Church; they're at the center.**

In the Kingdom of God, there is one ginormous banquet table and all invited to dinner. There are seats for everyone and no one is turned away! Enough food and drink for all.

Until the day that Kingdom of God is established on Earth, people of faith work to ensure that the poor and the needy are not intentionally excluded or thoughtlessly uninvited. We walk in with them. We serve them. ("We teach human dignity best by serving where it is most likely to be disregarded – in the poor and abandoned." [Fr. Ted Hesburgh])

In the Responsorial Psalm, we acknowledge the preferential option for the poor and vulnerable:

"God, in your goodness, you have made a home for the poor.

"The father of orphans and the defender of widows is God in his holy dwelling. God gives a home to the forsaken; he leads forth prisoners to prosperity.

"In your goodness, O God, you provided it for the needy."

Fulfilling a duty to the needy is nothing more remarkable than showing our love for God by fulfilling our duty. **"When we attend to the needs of those in want, we give them what is theirs, not ours. More than performing works of mercy, we are paying a debt of justice."** (St. Gregory the Great)

(Readings for the 22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time)



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