

Jesus' mission, our mission

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When Jesus came out from the desert after spending 40 days in fasting and prayer following his baptism by John, he went to the synagogue in his hometown, as was His custom. From the scroll of Isaiah He read: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord." After rolling up the scroll, he sat down and said, "Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing." (cf. Lk 4:14-21)

With those words, Jesus set forth his own agenda and laid out the mission for his disciples then and now. As men especially called through our diaconal ordination to be living witnesses to Christ the Servant in the world, that Gospel message is meant for us.

We are called to bring Good News to the poor – poor of the purse, poor of the spirit, the unloved and unloving, and those searching for love – that riches are not material; to bring liberty to captives, to help break the bonds of addiction, the chains of possessions; to bring sight to the blind, to bring healing and comfort to the afflicted and the light of truth to the darkness of lies and the shadows of evil. We are called to free the oppressed, because every man and woman is a child of God made in God's image and likeness, with undeniable dignity that comes from God at the first moment of life.

Some years ago, there was a priest-pastor in an urban parish in India. Most of his parishioners worked for the railroad as office workers, managers, engineers, conductors, mechanics, track laborers, cleaners and sweepers. Some lived very comfortably, some were very poor.

Once a year, the parish had a special celebration when those who were able brought food and other goods to help the needy. During the Mass, when the offerings were brought to the priest-celebrant, the chairman of the committee representing the poor refused to accept them.

"We don't want charity. We want justice," he said. "When you see me on the street, I want you to look at me and not turn away. I am a child of God. I have dignity from the first moment of life that comes from God, not from a rich man or the government or a bigger television.

"I want you to welcome me as a brother in Christ. Don't reject me or turn away because I am poor or can't read. Don't shove me out of the way and make me sit out of sight on the floor in a corner. Don't force me to live out of the way in a crowded slum, with mud streets that are open sewers, in a shelter that is falling apart.

"Pay me a decent wage so I can feed and clothe and educate my family. Don't make me work 12 hours a day every day. When I do a job for you in your house, don't cheat me by paying me less than we agreed."

The priest refused to continue the Mass until the two sides sat down to talk and began to understand one another and to be reconciled. Five hours later, Mass resumed.

As disciples, as deacons, we are called to continue Christ's mission, to bring his prophetic message to the issues and conditions of today.

Brothers: "Receive the Gospel of Christ, whose herald you now are..." Let us receive the Good News with fervent joy as we live the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.