

## **Lifting Up the Poor**

25th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year C)

September 22, 2019

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Helping the poor is a wonderful thing to do. Whether it is through giving to charity, donating to a food or clothing drive, or simply offering something to someone in need, all of these actions are good and should be encouraged. But there is something even more that we can do for the poor; that is, lift them up. Notice in today's psalm, Psalm 113, it doesn't just say, 'Praise the Lord who gives to the poor,' but "Praise the Lord who lifts up the poor." There is a significant difference between the two.

Giving to the poor can be a way of keeping the poor beneath us. In the words of our First Reading from the prophet *Amos*, it allows us to "trample upon the needy and destroy the poor of the land," all with a guilt-free conscience. While we think we are being generous, in reality the scales have already been tipped in our favor. We are above them before, during, and after our charity to them. This help we give them is just a temporary fix to a deeper need.

Lifting up the poor, as the Lord does, is much more radical. Whenever we lift someone up, we no longer demand to have the upper hand over them. We acknowledge our common humanity and work together as equals on the same level. The scales are rebalanced and just. As a society, we do not lift up the poor, but keep pushing them down. We do this not so much out of malice, but out of our own selfish desire for mammon. We would rather accumulate more and more mammon, or dishonest wealth, at the poor's expense than share our God-given humanity, which is our true wealth, with them. But as Jesus says in today's Gospel, you cannot serve both God and mammon. You "will either hate

one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other.”  
Lifting up the poor is to choose God.

A man who did much more than simply give to the poor but truly lifted them up was the martyred archbishop of San Salvador, Oscar Romero. Archbishop Romero had power in both the Church and society. Yet, he abandoned it in order to empower the poor. A few months before he was killed in 1980, he said: “This is Christ’s mission, to take the good news to the poor, to those who receive only bad news, to those who are always trampled by the powerful, to those who watch pass by, out of their reach, the riches that satisfy others. The Lord comes for them to make them happy and to tell them: Do not covet. Count yourselves happy and wealthy with the great gift brought to you by the one who being rich became poor to be with you.” (*The Violence of Love*, 185)

*Lifting up the poor by affirming their dignity is much more God-like than just giving to the poor.*

Whenever I give to the poor, do I also try to lift them up?

Giving to the poor is commendable. But let us do much more than that. That is what we can do with dishonest wealth. Let us give them the true wealth, the wealth of knowing that we are all heirs to the Kingdom.