

## **Respect the Poor**

28<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year B)

October 10, 2021

Fr. Tony Davis

During this respect life month, we consider all the wonderful ways that human life is valued. We think of those in the medical profession tending to the sick, those in health care who assist the elderly, those in law helping the migrants, those in education teaching the youth, those in ministry accompanying the hopeless, those in social work accompanying those in recovery, etc. For as much as we value human life, however, there is always room for improvement. From the beginning of life to its end, we strive to be a pro-life Church.

One large diverse group of people in particular that we should respect more, both as a church and as a country, is the poor. While we should continue working towards eliminating poverty and not idealize it, those in poverty can teach us a lot about a relationship with God. That is because they do not struggle with one of the greatest obstacles to the Kingdom of God: wealth. In today's Gospel, Jesus has a hard saying, perhaps even harder than his saying on marriage and divorce last weekend: "How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" To be clear, wealth in itself is not evil. It can be used for good. But sooner or later, it will become an obstacle. Wealth may very well make us walk away from Jesus sad, like the man in today's Gospel, who had many possessions.

Our first reading today tells us that wealth and riches are nothing in comparison with wisdom. The author says, "all gold, in view of her (wisdom), is a little sand, and before her, silver is to be accounted

mire.” This suggests that those who are poor have a better chance at finding wisdom, for wisdom is not found in having many possessions on earth, but in having treasure in heaven. The poor have wisdom because they prioritize community and reliance on God over individualism and reliance on self. We have a lot to learn from the poor.

In 1986, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops wrote a Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the US Economy called *Economic Justice for All*. In that bold document, along with solutions to help alleviate poverty, they challenge our attitudes towards the poor. They write,

We ask everyone to refrain from actions, words, or attitudes that stigmatize the poor, that exaggerate the benefits received by the poor, and that inflate the amount of fraud in welfare payments. These are symptoms of a punitive attitude towards the poor. The belief persists in this country that the poor are poor by choice or through laziness, that anyone can escape poverty by hard work, and that welfare programs make it easier for people to avoid work.” (194)

According to the bishops, the stereotypes we have of the poor are both inaccurate and disrespectful. Most of the time, they are born into it or it is forced upon them. Whenever we humiliate the poor or speak down to them, we are not being pro-life.

*We should respect the poor and learn from them what a life without the obstacle of wealth means. Do I respect the poor?*

As we continue with this mass, let us pray that we may be ready if Jesus were to say to us, “Go, sell what you have, and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.”