

When it comes to movies with Church themes we normally can't compete with Hollywood. But almost 20 years ago there was an Italian production about the life of Mother Teresa of Calcutta, which is actually in English and it was very well done. The film has many striking scenes, but one that struck me in particular occurs in a hotel board room. It is at the point of her life where mother Theresa has become well known, fame has struck, and essentially the people around her are strategizing about the expansion of her mission. How to raise the funds and spread the word so as to do more and more good work. How to plan strategically in order to make sure the good work would continue into the future.

Mother Teresa is uncomfortable with the opulence of the place and she becomes more and more agitated. And so what does she do? She basically fires them. She dissolves the association that had been formed to support her work. Despite the protests that without proper structures, proper strategic planning the work will suffer, she declares that the bank accounts are to be closed, there will no more magazines, no more hotels, no more meetings. We shall be poor amongst the poor.

Now her decision was pretty severe and despite being recognized as a saint, we know she was very direct, and she let nothing get in the way of what she felt was the correct response to the call of God in her life. It was God's work and it will be done according to God's plan.

But her reaction gives an intimation of how we can apply today's Gospel into our own lives. We must always be wary of the wellspring of our own riches. And by that I don't mean just material riches. We open our poverty to God and let him use it for his good purposes. In today's Gospel it was material poverty. The widow had virtually no material resources but out of a love for God she gave what she had.

But how do we give out of our poverty? A few ideas

Mother Teresa rejected the bureaucratic mentality. Why, because she wanted to emphasize the need of personal sharing, dialogue and encounter. Enter into the lives of those who are before you and share God's love with them. Don't wait for the system, or the organization, or the government to do it for you. We don't have what it takes, or the skills or the resources but we share what we have as best as we are able. Even if that is only a kind word or a smile.

In his criticism of the Pharisees of today's Gospel Jesus warns us about the show, about putting on airs and the need to be seen. Do we need some sort of recognition or prize for our good works? When we can let go of the need for applause then we are giving from our poverty and not of our riches.

Can we let go of comparing our lot with others? Can we fight that spirit of complaint and jealousy that criticizes others and desires to have a different, better life? When we stop worrying about the grass being greener on the other side of the fence we give of our poverty and not our riches.

And finally how do I integrate prayer into my life? How do I integrate prayer into my work, my good works? Prayer keeps our poverty at the forefront. When we pray we realize that it is not my work, my good deeds, my sacrifice but my participation in the work of Christ, the work of his redemption. Prayer allows us to draw strength from beyond ourselves and to give from our poverty and not our riches.