

The Lord hears the cry of the poor... The Lord listens to their plea; And to hearts broken, God is near, who will hear the cry of the poor?ⁱ When the Israelites were held in captivity in Egypt they cried out for help and the Lord set them free. They crossed through the Red Sea on their journey to the Promised Land. When they were hungry and thirsty in the desert, the Lord provided manna and Moses split the rock at Massah and Meribah so water would flow freely.

The Lord hears the cry of the poor. Sometimes our memory is very short. We grow in affluence and can forget all that the Lord has done for us. We stop taking time for prayer. We become the powerful and we oppress others. Our first reading from Exodus is addressed to the Israelites who have forgotten what it was like to be poor and so Moses reminds them of some basic social laws that are necessary to live in right relationship with God and with neighbors.

- Lend money to help someone, not to profit from exorbitant interest (Exodus 22:24).
- Never do anything to slight an orphan or a widow (v 21).
- Treat a foreigner with the same respect you would a citizen (v 20).
- Don't let your neighbor go cold at night (v 25-26).

God hears the cry of the poor and we are called to respect them in the same way the Lord does.

Every culture tries to teach its values and instill them in the young and old alike. For Athabascans, important cultural values include:

- Caring and providing for the family
- Respect for elders and others
- Respect for the land and nature
- Sharing and caring

What we do for our own family and tribe helps us to care for others beyond our immediate family and cultural group. God hears the cry of the poor and we are called to respect those most in need with the same compassionate heart of our Lord.

If a policeman issues a traffic ticket, there is usually a fine that goes along with it. The laws of the Israelites were meant to encourage proper behavior, but if broken, they carried a set fine just like a traffic ticket.

- The person who starts a fire that gets out of hand and burns the crop of a neighbor is responsible for making full restitution (Exodus 22:5).
- When we are dishonest and take or misuse what is not ours, we should make a twofold restitution (v 8).
- "When someone gives money or articles to another for safekeeping and they are stolen from the latter's house, the thief, if caught, must make twofold restitution" (v 6).

God hears the cry of the poor and we are called to respect them as the Lord does.

The Lord listens to hearts broken, and God responds with mercy and compassion. When we sin, there is no traffic ticket but there is still a heavy price to pay. If we were to take the sin of Adam and Eve, add our own sins, and the sins of all humanity, what would the equivalent of a twofold restitution be? We need look no further than the cross. For Jesus "emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross" (Phil 2:7-8). There is no way we can make a fair and just restitution to God. However, just as God hears the cry of the poor and responds, we are called to respond in the same way the Lord does. "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. [...And], you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Mt 22:37-39).

We live in a deeply divided society. You have seen or heard how violent a person can become when asked to wear a mask for safety and protection against spreading the coronavirus.

What if we could see beyond our own point of view to listen to someone with an opposing view? What if we listened and empathized with them? What if we walked a mile in their shoes? What if we could understand justice through the eyes of God? How different might the world be?

- Bernard Nathanson was a leading advocate for abortion when he saw an ultrasound and began to understand what it is like for a child in the womb. After some very serious soul searching, he had a profound conversion and atoned for his sins. He became an advocate for life helping others hear the silent scream of a child in the womb. What if every life that is conceived were born?
- Violence and sexual assault against women are a worldwide epidemic that has tragically silenced victims since the dawn of time. Three years ago actress Alyssa Milano posted on Twitter, “If all the women who have been sexually harassed or assaulted wrote ‘Me too’ as a status, we might give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem.” Silent voices came forward from all walks of life. Many rich and powerful perpetrators fell from positions of authority and stature. What if every female was truly respected as created in the image and likeness of God?
- On May 25th, George Floyd gasped for breath and cried out “I can’t breathe.” Officer Derek Chauvin continued to apply deadly pressure until George Floyd could breathe no longer. People from around the world have taken to the streets chanting “Black Lives Matter” and marching for justice. Demonstrations in every major city around the world have highlighted the abuse of power against minorities in almost every culture. What if every Christian truly understood the words of Saint Paul? “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).

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ⁱ John Michael Talbot – the Lord hears the cry of the poor