

We live in the land of plenty and yet there is great poverty. Mother Teresa said it very eloquently: “The greatest disease in the West today is not TB or leprosy; it is being unwanted, unloved, and uncared for. We can cure physical diseases with medicine, but the only cure for loneliness, despair, and hopelessness is love. There are many in the world who are dying for a piece of bread but there are many more dying for a little love. The poverty in the West is a different kind of poverty -- it is not only a poverty of loneliness but also of spirituality. There’s a hunger for love, as there is a hunger for God.”

The greatest disease in the world today would appear to be the Corona Virus. Over 600,000 people have died with the virus in the United States alone. Globally the number of deaths exceeds 3.8 million. What Mother Teresa spoke of decades ago is still true today. The Corona Virus has only amplified the underlying poverty of loneliness and spirituality. With many vaccinated, we have a sense that the tide is turning. Vaccines did not cure the virus, but they have helped to limit its spread. Meanwhile tensions continue to mount as people express their frustration in increasingly violent ways. In DeKalb County Georgia, a grocery store clerk was shot and killed when she asked a shopper to pull up his mask.

Against this backdrop, Jesus offers us the Lord’s Prayer to help us to pray. He reminds us “Your Father knows what you need before you ask him” (Mt 6:8). So, it is good to recognize that as you pray, you really need to be listening to God. Jesus often withdrew in prayer in the quiet of the night to spend time in prayer with his Father. Spending time in prayer can help to revive our spirits as we pay less attention to our own worries and more to the needs of God in helping us to grow in our love of God and our neighbor.

“Give us this day our daily bread.” The bread we truly need is the Bread of Life. We need Jesus. Sadly, in a world of spiritual poverty, many feel so self sufficient that they spend a lot of time looking for God in the wrong places. In our over materialistic culture, some feel that material wealth is the answer. Yes ... it may make life more comfortable ... but does it truly feed the soul?

Jesus showed us what love looks like as he suffered and died for us on the cross to free us from sin and the sting of death. “This is my commandment: love one another as I love you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (Jn 15:12-13). As God forgives you, you are called to forgive others in return. As God loves us, you are called to love others in return. As Jesus sacrifices his life for your salvation, you are called to live a sacrificial life in order to help others.

A cure for loneliness is to reach out and care for others. A cure for despair is to look at the crosses others carry and to thank God that yours is light in comparison, then offer a hand to help another. A cure for hopelessness is to place your worries in God’s hands. I am reminded of the saying of Pope John XXIII as he prepared to go to sleep each night. “I’ve done my best in your service ... this day, Oh Lord. I’m going to bed. It’s your church. Take care of it!”ⁱ

Let me close with a few other sayings of Pope John XXIII, which echo the love of God and of neighbor that Jesus teaches us in the Lord’s prayer:ⁱⁱ

- Prayer is the raising of the mind to God. We must always remember this. The actual words matter less.
- Whoever has a heart full of love always has something to give.
- O Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, I would like to be filled with love for You; keep me closely united with You, may my heart be near to Yours.
- Never hesitate to hold out your hand; never hesitate to accept the outstretched hand of another.

ⁱ stdominicparish.ca/pope-john-xxiii-and-pope-john-paul-ii/

ⁱⁱ quotetab.com/quotes/by-pope-john-xxiii