

33OrdC

Over the past months you may have seen a commercial on television for GMC trucks based on "the rule of three". It states that the "rule of three" dictates that things which come in threes are more appealing than those that don't. GMC couldn't agree more with this statement, so it introduces its trio of trucks. While they describe this rule, they show images of things that come in threes to emphasize the number three.

Today, the number three should stick out for us in a much different way. We are transported, not by GMC trucks, but by the Church, on this Thirty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time to the virtual end of the Church Year. Next Sunday we will celebrate the Solemnity of Jesus Christ, King of the Universe, closing this Year of Faith. And today is the third year that our Holy Father, Pope Francis, has designated the Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time as the World Day of the Poor.

We are all so very aware of the Gospel passage of the Beatitudes. Saint Luke's Gospel, whose Gospel we have been following this Liturgical Year, begins the Beatitudes this way, "Blessed are you who are poor, for the kingdom of God is yours." So, the fact that one is poor should, in and of itself, not have a negative connotation for the individual who is poor. Should we take the time to carefully read the Gospels, we would find that very true. Jesus never paints the poor in a negative light.

The Gospel message and Gospel challenge is to treat the poor as God treats us, the poor. If you have never seen yourself as poor, let me paint a picture for you from today's Scriptures.

The first reading is from the Prophet Malachi, a book we rarely see in our Sunday readings. The prophet calls us to be aware of the coming of the "day of the Lord". Salvation history is punctuated with visits from God to humans to guide, intervene, announce, and reward or destroy. Look at the stories of the Garden of Eden, the Great Flood, the entry into the Promised Land, the return from exiles, the Annunciation, the Incarnation, the Crucifixion, the Resurrection and Pentecost. If we were not poor, would God have needed to intervene?

In Saint Paul's Letter to the Thessalonians, Paul talks of the need to work, so as not to be a burden. If we were not spiritually poor, not fallen in nature, God would not have told Adam that it was because of sin that we would need to work in order to eat. God would have provided. If we were not poor, we would have abundant food without working.

The Gospel passage itself is extremely poignant in its portrayal of the end of the temple. It evokes the images of the end of life and the end of the world, ends that are experienced in a kind of turmoil that would never have existed had sin not entered the world. The poverty created by sin has come to a climax in not only our death, but the death of Jesus Christ on the Cross, and the death of the world.

The beauty that arises is the hope that comes from all the promises that God has given the poor from the first day Adam and Eve became poor. Virtually every prophet of the Old Testament, virtually every chapter of the Gospels, and virtually every Epistle and the Acts of the Apostles and the Book of Revelation gives preferential status to the poor. This is not happenstance. This is God's revelation of God's love for the poor; it is God's revelation of God's love for us.

What is not as evident in our world is humanity's reflection of God's love for the poor in society. In Pope Francis' Message for this Third World Day of the Poor, he uses Psalm 9, verse 19 as a starting point. "The hope of the poor shall not perish for ever."

Here are some of the thoughts our Holy Father shares:

- The Psalm was composed at a time of great economic development that, as often happens, also led to serious social imbalances. The inequitable distribution of wealth created a significant number of poor people, compared to the privileged few. The adage seems true; history repeats itself; we may not have learned from the past.
- Frequently the poor are judged for the tools they use to survive; they are judged as parasites; they are not even forgiven for being poor. They are not allowed to be timid or discouraged. They are seen as a threat or simply useless, simply because they are poor.
- The Scriptures give us a picture of the poor as a people of trust, a people who know the Lord and "knowing" involves a personal relationship of affection and love. The poor, throughout the Scriptures, and most often throughout history and throughout the world today, are a people that proclaim God does not abandon them. They have some of the most vibrant signs of hope and some of the most vibrant forms of worship.
- Scripture constantly speaks of God acting on behalf of the poor, hearing the cry of the poor, coming to their aid. Jesus said, "Whatever you did to one of the least of these my brethren, you did to me."

I remember fondly Bishop Pilla's words when he would visit parishes and talk to the people. He always told the people that they were "good people". Good people include people from all levels of the social-economic spectrum who respond to God's call to holiness. Without taking even an iota of wonder, love, and respect from those who share from their abundance, one cannot help but to look to the hope seen when looking to the poor in their worship which, as Pope Francis said, is so frequently vibrant, when they pray when it is so often sincere, when they describe their lives when they include words of love. They never seem to find God indifferent or silent in the face of their plea.

The poor themselves seem to care for the poor as if their very lives depend on doing so, and quite literally they do. They live the Gospel adage, "Whatsoever you did to one of the least of these my brethren, you did to Me." Pope Francis says, "If we refuse to make this identification, we falsify the Gospel and water down God's revelation."

Our Holy Father's message for today is inspiring and worth reading in its entirety. The online link is in today's parish bulletin. For those who do not have internet access, there are copies on the shelves of the Parish Resource Center in the Narthex.

Remember the "rule of three" from GMC? On this third World Day of the Poor on the 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time, I would suggest you consider three things:

- First – remember you are poor due to sin, and that God has seen fit to redeem you.
- Secondly – you are God's instrument by virtue of your Baptism and if you are not responsive to the poor of this world, God's work will be done less well than if you do respond.
- Thirdly – Poverty does not deprive the poor of their God-given dignity; only human decisions that fail to respond will portray an image lacking dignity.

Remembering these three points will help to bless GMC – God's Marvelous Children – the poor and those who care for them.

For today, I wish to close as Pope Francis closed his message, quoting from the last line of today's reading from the Prophet Malachi, "May you always treasure the words of the prophet who proclaims a different future: 'For you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings.'"