



Stretch out your hand
to the poor

2020

Presentation

“Stretch forth your hand to the poor”. This year Pope Francis uses the words from the book of Sirach to shed light on the great story of poverty that envelopes entire nations. The pandemic that the world is experiencing has brought to light a poverty that many had forgotten: *fragility*. By definition the poor are fragile, because they lack what is necessary and their existence depends on the generosity and solidarity of others. Paradoxical as it may seem, Covid has made it possible for us to discover that we are all weak and dependent on others. No one is excluded from this condition. The great of the earth, the powerful of the world and the man on the street are all on the same level. The facemask can be a first line of defense, but the virus creeps in regardless of one’s good intentions. We cannot save ourselves alone, but only together. The images are still fresh in our eyes of the generosity of so many people who really gave their lives to help those in need. Some even called them “heroes”, as so many people are no longer used to seeing acts of daily life where commitment and generosity should be normal and everyone's traveling companions.

The outstretched hand can never be just one way. Whoever extends his hand must be sure that it is met by another hand. Help is reciprocal. Nor should it make a difference whose hand is held out first. Everyone has a need and everyone receives something: whoever extends it must be able to count on solidarity and whoever helps must be responsible. Weakness and fragility have different faces, but the face of Jesus Christ is imprinted on each one, asking to be recognized. We cannot turn our gaze elsewhere, as we would be betraying ourselves because we would become even weaker. Closed in on ourselves, we look for the defenses that no one can guarantee because they exist only in recognizing the importance of the other. Personal fragility is overcome with the strength of the community.

Therefore, this year the World Day of the Poor enters more directly into each of our homes. The awareness of the fragility experienced in the months of lockdown helps us rediscover the need of those who, on a daily basis, live next to us and carry permanently imprinted on their bodies what we have experienced for only a few days. We cannot forget. Pope Francis' Message helps a lot in this sense because it brings to the fore the concreteness of the gestures that enriched the poverty of those moments. “The outstretched hands of physicians who cared about each patient and tried to find the right cure. The outstretched hands of nurses who worked overtime, for hours on end to look after the sick. The outstretched hands of administrators who procured the means to save as many lives as

possible. The outstretched hands of pharmacists who at personal risk responded to people's pressing needs. The outstretched hands of priests whose hearts broke as they offered a blessing. The outstretched hands of volunteers who helped people living on the streets and those with a home but with nothing to eat. The outstretched hands of men and women who worked to provide essential services and security. We could continue to speak of so many other outstretched hands, all of which make up a great litany of good works. Those hands defied contagion and fear in order to offer support and consolation" (n. 6).

Before this sign of great humanity and responsibility, Pope Francis, nonetheless, contrasts the image of those who continue to keep "their hands in their pockets and to remain unmoved by situations of poverty in which they are often accomplices" (n.9). The list, fortunately shorter and showing that good is always far greater than the greed of a few, also describes scenes of everyday life: "If they stretch out their hands, it is to touch computer keys to transfer sums of money from one part of the world to another, ensuring the wealth of an elite few and the dire poverty of millions and the ruin of entire nations. Some hands are outstretched to accumulate money by the sale of weapons that others, including those of children, use to sow death and poverty. Other hands are outstretched to deal doses of death in dark alleys in order to grow rich and live in luxury and excess, or to quietly pass a bribe for the sake of quick and corrupt gain. Others still, parading a sham respectability, lay down laws which they themselves do not observe" (n. 9). Harsh words, but unfortunately true, that show how much lack of social responsibility is still present in the world today with the consequence of extreme poverty that is growing out of proportion.

The "outstretched hand" is an invitation to take responsibility for making one's own contribution. This is evident in gestures of daily life capable of alleviating the fate of those who live in hardship and lack the dignity of the children of God. Pope Francis is not afraid to identify these people as true saints, "those next door" who simply, without fanfare and publicity, offer genuine witness of Christian love. The massive presence of so many faces of the poor demands that Christians always be at the forefront, and feel the need to know that they lack something essential when a poor person comes before them. "We cannot feel "alright" when any member of the human family is left behind and in the shadows" (n. 4), writes Pope Francis in his Message. It is as though he has invited us to make the "restless heart" of Saint Augustine our own. Remain restless until God is found imprinted on the face of the poor.

The poverty of the pandemic has helped to rediscover the need for prayer. It is no small thing. Most likely, this is the result of a dual emotion. On the one hand, fear that grips our days because, as mentioned, we feel weak and fragile. On the other hand, knowing that there is a force that goes beyond ourselves, that dominates the world and continues to keep it alive in His mercy. Beyond emotions that are often fleeting, the need for prayer should be tenaciously held on to. Prayer not only lifts our minds and hearts towards God, but it forces us to look at our brothers' faces. We look to God to ask him to look at us and our brothers and sisters. Prayer is listening to the voice of God who speaks in silence and reaches the heart of every person who places himself before him to give praise and glory above all. Yet, precisely in listening to the relationship with God, prayer becomes a presentation of what man needs. In this space one can discover the closeness of God who never leaves us alone. The time of prayer is transformed into expectation, hope and obedience to his word. That is, we understand what is truly essential, what the joy of living is truly worth, despite trials.

The World Day of the Poor, therefore, is not just a sporadic act of generosity, but once again the impetus to enter with greater intensity into our own soul. Solidarity spreads and becomes true charity because it is moved by prayer that knows how to understand the profound needs of the brother or sister who lives with me in the light of God's presence.

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Message of Pope Francis for the Fourth World Day of the Poor

“Stretch forth your hand to the poor” (Sir 7:32)

“Stretch forth your hand to the poor” (Sir 7:32). Age-old wisdom has proposed these words as a sacred rule to be followed in life. Today these words remain as timely as ever. They help us fix our gaze on what is essential and overcome the barriers of indifference. Poverty always appears in a variety of guises, and calls for attention to each particular situation. In all of these, we have an opportunity to encounter the Lord Jesus, who has revealed himself as present in the least of his brothers and sisters (cf. Mt 25:40).

1. Let us take up the Old Testament book of Sirach, in which we find the words of a sage who lived some two hundred years before Christ. He sought out the wisdom that makes men and women better and more capable of insight into the affairs of life. He did this at a time of severe testing for the people of Israel, a time of suffering, grief and poverty due to the domination of foreign powers. As a man of great faith, rooted in the traditions of his forebears, his first thought was to turn to God and to beg from him the gift of wisdom. The Lord did not refuse his help.

From the book’s first pages, its author presents his advice concerning many concrete situations in life, one of which is poverty. He insists that even amid hardship we must continue to trust in God: “Do not be alarmed when disaster comes. Cling to him and do not leave him, so that you may be honoured at the end of your days. Whatever happens to you, accept it, and in the uncertainties of your humble state, be patient, since gold is tested in the fire, and chosen men in the furnace of humiliation. Trust him and he will uphold you, follow a straight path and hope in him. You who fear the Lord, wait for his mercy; do not turn aside in case you fall” (2:2-7).

2. In page after page, we discover a precious compendium of advice on how to act in the light of a close relationship with God, creator and lover of creation, just and provident towards all his children. This constant reference to God, however, does not detract from a concrete consideration of mankind. On the contrary, the two are closely connected.

This is clearly demonstrated by the passage from which the theme of this year’s Message is taken (cf. 7:29-36). Prayer to God and solidarity with the poor and suffering are inseparable. In order to perform an act of worship acceptable to the Lord, we have to recognize that each person, even the poorest and most contemptible, is made in the image of God. From this awareness comes the gift of God’s blessing, drawn by the generosity we show to the poor. Time devoted to prayer can never become an alibi for neglecting our neighbour in need. In fact the very opposite is true: the Lord’s blessing descends upon us and prayer attains its goal when accompanied by service to the poor.

3. How timely too, for ourselves, is this ancient teaching! Indeed, the word of God transcends space and time, religions and cultures. Generosity that supports the weak, consoles the afflicted, relieves suffering and restores dignity to those stripped of it, is a condition for a fully human life. The decision to care for the poor, for their many different needs, cannot be conditioned by the time available or by private interests, or by impersonal pastoral or social projects. The power of God’s grace cannot be restrained by the selfish tendency to put ourselves always first.

Keeping our gaze fixed on the poor is difficult, but more necessary than ever if we are to give proper direction to our personal life and the life of society. It is not a matter of fine words but of a concrete commitment inspired by divine charity. Each year, on the World Day of the Poor, I reiterate this basic truth in the life of the Church, for the poor are and always will be with us to help us welcome Christ's presence into our daily lives (cf. Jn 12:8).

4. Encountering the poor and those in need constantly challenges us and forces us to think. How can we help to eliminate or at least alleviate their marginalization and suffering? How can we help them in their spiritual need? The Christian community is called to be involved in this kind of sharing and to recognize that it cannot be delegated to others. In order to help the poor, we ourselves need to live the experience of evangelical poverty. We cannot feel "alright" when any member of the human family is left behind and in the shadows. The silent cry of so many poor men, women and children should find the people of God at the forefront, always and everywhere, in efforts to give them a voice, to protect and support them in the face of hypocrisy and so many unfulfilled promises, and to invite them to share in the life of the community.

The Church certainly has no comprehensive solutions to propose, but by the grace of Christ she can offer her witness and her gestures of charity. She likewise feels compelled to speak out on behalf of those who lack life's basic necessities. For the Christian people, to remind everyone of the great value of the common good is a vital commitment, expressed in the effort to ensure that no one whose human dignity is violated in its basic needs will be forgotten.

5. The ability to stretch forth our hand shows that we possess an innate capacity to act in ways that give meaning to life. How many outstretched hands do we see every day! Sadly, it is more and more the case that the frenetic pace of life sucks us into a whirlwind of indifference, to the point that we no longer know how to recognize the good silently being done each day and with great generosity all around us. Only when something happens that upsets the course of our lives do our eyes become capable of seeing the goodness of the saints "next door", of "those who, living in our midst, reflect God's presence" (*Gaudete et Exsultate*, 7), but without fanfare. Bad news fills the pages of newspapers, websites and television screens, to the point that evil seems to reign supreme. But that is not the case. To be sure, malice and violence, abuse and corruption abound, but life is interwoven too with acts of respect and generosity that not only compensate for evil, but inspire us to take an extra step and fill our hearts with hope.

6. A hand held out is a sign; a sign that immediately speaks of closeness, solidarity and love. In these months, when the whole world was prey to a virus that brought pain and death, despair and bewilderment, how many outstretched hands have we seen! The outstretched hands of physicians who cared about each patient and tried to find the right cure. The outstretched hands of nurses who worked overtime, for hours on end, to look after the sick. The outstretched hands of administrators who procured the means to save as many lives as possible. The outstretched hands of pharmacists who at personal risk responded to people's pressing needs. The outstretched hands of priests whose hearts broke as they offered a blessing. The outstretched hands of volunteers who helped people living on the streets and those with a home yet nothing to eat. The outstretched hands of men and women who worked to provide essential services and security. We could continue to speak of so

many other outstretched hands, all of which make up a great litany of good works. Those hands defied contagion and fear in order to offer support and consolation.

7. This pandemic arrived suddenly and caught us unprepared, sparking a powerful sense of bewilderment and helplessness. Yet hands never stopped reaching out to the poor. This has made us all the more aware of the presence of the poor in our midst and their need for help. Structures of charity, works of mercy, cannot be improvised. Constant organization and training is needed, based on the realization of our own need for an outstretched hand. The present experience has challenged many of our assumptions. We feel poorer and less self-sufficient because we have come to sense our limitations and the restriction of our freedom. The loss of employment, and of opportunities to be close to our loved ones and our regular acquaintances, suddenly opened our eyes to horizons that we had long since taken for granted. Our spiritual and material resources were called into question and we found ourselves experiencing fear. In the silence of our homes, we rediscovered the importance of simplicity and of keeping our eyes fixed on the essentials. We came to realize how much we need a new sense of fraternity, for mutual help and esteem. Now is a good time to recover “the conviction that we need one another, that we have a shared responsibility for others and the world... We have had enough of immorality and the mockery of ethics, goodness, faith and honesty... When the foundations of social life are corroded, what ensues are battles over conflicting interests, new forms of violence and brutality, and obstacles to the growth of a genuine culture of care for the environment” (Laudato Si’, 229). In a word, until we revive our sense of responsibility for our neighbour and for every person, grave economic, financial and political crises will continue.

8. This year’s theme – “Stretch forth your hand to the poor” – is thus a summons to responsibility and commitment as men and women who are part of our one human family. It encourages us to bear the burdens of the weakest, in accord with the words of Saint Paul: “Through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself’... Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ” (Gal 5:13-14; 6:2). The Apostle teaches that the freedom bestowed through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ makes us individually responsible for serving others, especially the weakest. This is not an option, but rather a sign of the authenticity of the faith we profess.

Here again, the book of Sirach can help us. It suggests concrete ways to support the most vulnerable and it uses striking images. First, it asks us to sympathize with those who are sorrowing: “Do not fail those who weep” (7:34). The time of pandemic forced us into strict isolation, making it impossible even to see and console friends and acquaintances grieving the loss of their loved ones. The sacred author also says: “Do not shrink from visiting the sick” (7:35). We have been unable to be close to those who suffer, and at the same time we have become more aware of the fragility of our own lives. The word of God allows for no complacency; it constantly impels us to acts of love.

9. At the same time, the command: “Stretch forth your hand to the poor” challenges the attitude of those who prefer to keep their hands in their pockets and to remain unmoved by situations of poverty in which they are often complicit. Indifference and cynicism are their daily food. What a difference from the generous hands we have described! If they stretch out their hands, it is to touch computer keys to transfer sums of money from one part of the world to another, ensuring the wealth of an elite few and the dire poverty of millions

and the ruin of entire nations. Some hands are outstretched to accumulate money by the sale of weapons that others, including those of children, use to sow death and poverty. Other hands are outstretched to deal doses of death in dark alleys in order to grow rich and live in luxury and excess, or to quietly pass a bribe for the sake of quick and corrupt gain. Others still, parading a sham respectability, lay down laws which they themselves do not observe. Amid all these scenarios, “the excluded are still waiting. To sustain a lifestyle which excludes others, or to sustain enthusiasm for that selfish ideal, a globalization of indifference has developed. Almost without being aware of it, we end up being incapable of feeling compassion at the outcry of the poor, weeping for other people’s pain, and feeling a need to help them, as though all this were someone else’s responsibility and not our own” (Evangeliū Gaudium, 54). We cannot be happy until these hands that sow death are transformed into instruments of justice and peace for the whole world.

10. “In everything you do, remember your end” (Sir 7:36). These are the final words of this chapter of the book of Sirach. They can be understood in two ways. First, our lives will sooner or later come to an end. Remembering our common destiny can help lead to a life of concern for those poorer than ourselves or lacking the opportunities that were ours. But second, there is also an end or goal towards which each of us is tending. And this means that our lives are a project and a process. The “end” of all our actions can only be love. This is the ultimate goal of our journey, and nothing should distract us from it. This love is one of sharing, dedication and service, born of the realization that we were first loved and awakened to love. We see this in the way children greet their mother’s smile and feel loved simply by virtue of being alive. Even a smile that we can share with the poor is a source of love and a way of spreading love. An outstretched hand, then, can always be enriched by the smile of those who quietly and unassumingly offer to help, inspired only by the joy of living as one of Christ’s disciples.

In this journey of daily encounter with the poor, the Mother of God is ever at our side. More than any other, she is the Mother of the Poor. The Virgin Mary knows well the difficulties and sufferings of the marginalized, for she herself gave birth to the Son of God in a stable. Due to the threat of Herod, she fled to another country with Joseph her spouse and the child Jesus. For several years, the Holy Family lived as refugees. May our prayer to Mary, Mother of the Poor, unite these, her beloved children, with all those who serve them in Christ’s name. And may that prayer enable outstretched hands to become an embrace of shared and rediscovered fraternity.

Rome, Saint John Lateran, 13 June 2020
Memorial of Saint Anthony of Padua

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

Vatican Basilica

Third World Day of the Poor

33th Sunday of Ordinary Time, 17 November 2019

In today's Gospel, Jesus astounds both his contemporaries and us. While every else was praising the magnificent temple in Jerusalem, Jesus tells them that "one stone" will not be left "upon another" (Lk 21:6). Why does he speak these words about so sacred an institution, which was not merely a building but a unique religious symbol, a house for God and for the believing people? Why does he prophesy that the firm certitude of the people of God would collapse? Why, ultimately, does the Lord let our certitudes collapse, when our world has fewer and fewer of them?

Let us look for answers in the words of Jesus. He tells us that almost everything will pass away. Almost everything, but not everything. On this next to last Sunday in Ordinary Time, he explains that what will collapse and pass away are the penultimate things, not the ultimate ones: the temple, not God; kingdoms and human events, not humanity itself. The penultimate things, which often appear definitive but are not, pass away. They are majestic realities like our temples, and terrifying ones like earthquakes; they are signs in heaven and wars on the earth (cf. vv. 10-11). To us, these are front page news, but the Lord puts them on the second page. That which will never pass away remains on the front page: the living God, infinitely greater than any temple we build for him, and the human person, our neighbour, who is worth more than all the news reports of the world. So, to help us realize what really counts in life, Jesus warns us about two temptations.

The first is the temptation of haste, of the right now. For Jesus, we must not follow those who tell us that the end is coming immediately, that "the time is at hand" (v. 8). That is, we must not follow the alarmists who fuel fear of others and of the future, for fear paralyzes the heart and mind. Yet how often do we let ourselves be seduced by a frantic desire to know everything right now, by the itch of curiosity, by the latest sensational or scandalous news, by lurid stories, by the screaming those who shout loudest and angriest, by those who tell us it is "now or never". This haste, this everything right now, does not come from God. If we get worked up about the right now, we forget what remains forever: we follow the passing clouds and lose sight of the sky. Drawn by the latest outcry, we no longer find time for God or for our brother and sister living next door. How true this is today! In the frenzy of running, of achieving everything right now, anyone left behind is viewed as a nuisance. And considered disposable. How many elderly, unborn, disabled and poor persons are considered useless. We go our way in haste, without worrying that gaps are increasing, that the greed of a few is adding to the poverty of many others.

As an antidote to haste, Jesus today proposes to each of us perseverance. "By your endurance you will gain your lives" (v. 19). Perseverance entails moving forward each day with our eyes fixed on what does not pass away: the Lord and our neighbour. This is why perseverance is the gift of God that preserves all his other gifts (cf. Saint Augustine, *De Dono Perseverantiae*, 2.4). Let us ask that each of us, and all of us as Church, may persevere in the good and not lose sight of what really counts.

There is a second illusion that Jesus wants to spare us. He says: “Many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am he!’ Do not go after them” (v. 8). It is the temptation of self-centredness. Christians, since we do not seek the right now but the forever, are not concerned with the me but with the you. Christians, that is, do not follow the siren song of their whims, but rather the call of love, the voice of Jesus. How is Jesus’ voice discerned? “Many will come in my name”, the Lord says, but they are not to be followed: wearing the label “Christian” or “Catholic” is not enough to belong to Jesus. We need to speak the same language as Jesus: that of love, the language of the you. Those who speak the language of Jesus are not the ones who say I, but rather the ones who step out of themselves. And yet how often, even when we do good, does the hypocrisy of the self take over? I do good so that I can be considered good; I give in order to receive in turn; I offer help so that I can win the friendship of some important person. That is how the language of the self speaks. The word of God, however, spurs us to a “genuine love” (Rom 12:9), to give to those who cannot repay us (cf. Lk 14:14), to serve others without seeking anything in return (cf. Lk 6:35). So let us ask ourselves: “Do I help someone who has nothing to give me in return? Do I, a Christian, have at least one poor person as a friend”?

The poor are valuable in the eyes of God because they do not speak the language of the self: they do not support themselves on their own, by their own strength; they need someone to take them by the hand. The poor remind us how we should live the Gospel: like beggars reaching out to God. The presence of the poor makes us breathe the fresh air of the Gospel, where the poor in spirit are blessed (cf. Mt 5:3). Instead of feeling annoyed when they knock on our doors, let us welcome their cry for help as a summons to go out of ourselves, to welcome them with God’s own loving gaze. How beautiful it would be if the poor could occupy in our hearts the place they have in the heart of God! Standing with the poor, serving the poor, we see things as Jesus does; we see what remains and what passes away.

Let us return to our initial questions. Amid so many penultimate and passing realities, the Lord wants to remind us today of what is ultimate, what will remain forever. It is love, for “God is love” (1 Jn 4:8). The poor person who begs for my love leads me straight to God. The poor facilitate our access to heaven: this is why the sense of the faith of God’s People has viewed them as the gatekeepers of heaven. Even now, they are our treasure, the treasure of the Church. For the poor reveal to us the riches that never grow old, that unite heaven and earth, the riches for which life is truly worth living: the riches of love.

Suggestion I

Lectio Divina “Remember the poor”

The Word of God ...

I listened to...

Rm 15:25-27

At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem in a ministry to the saints; for Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to share their resources with the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. They were pleased to do this, and indeed they owe it to them; for if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material things.

1Cor 16:1-4

Now concerning the collection for the saints: you should follow the directions I gave to the churches of Galatia. On the first day of every week, each of you is to put aside and save whatever extra you earn, so that collections need not be taken when I come. And when I arrive, I will send any whom you approve with letters to take your gift to Jerusalem. If it seems advisable that I should go also, they will accompany me.

2Cor 9:1-15

Now it is not necessary for me to write you about the ministry to the saints, for I know your eagerness, which is the subject of my boasting about you to the people of Macedonia, saying that Achaia has been ready since last year; and your zeal has stirred up most of them. But I am sending the brothers in order that our boasting about you may not prove to have been empty in this case, so that you may be ready, as I said you would be; otherwise, if some Macedonians come with me and find that you are not ready, we would be humiliated—to say nothing of you—in this undertaking. So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you, and arrange in advance for this bountiful gift that you have promised, so that it may be ready as a voluntary gift and not as an extortion.

The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work. As it is written, “He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.” He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us; for the rendering of this ministry not

only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God. Through the testing of this ministry you glorify God by your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ and by the generosity of your sharing with them and with all others, while they long for you and pray for you because of the surpassing grace of God that he has given you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

Gal 5:13-15

For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.

Is meditated on....

This year the theme of the *World Day of the Poor* is taken from the admonition of the Old Testament: "Stretch forth your hand to the poor" (cfr *Sir 7:32*). This exhortation evokes the image of an outstretched hand that wants to help those who need what is necessary to live. Lending a hand to the poor is a fundamental aspect of piety in the Judeo-Christian tradition. And yet, curiously, St. Paul, the chief evangelizer of the New Testament, apparently has little to say about the poor. But is it really so? Let's reflect a little more on the attention that Paul gives to the theme of the poor.

Let's start with a fundamental testimony from Paul himself. In the Letter to the Galatians (cf. 1:18-2:10), when Paul recounts his encounter with the "pillars" of the Church - as he calls Cephas (Simon Peter), James the Lord's brother and John - to defend his apostolic call as "apostle of the Gentiles", he affirms that they approved his missionary activity on one condition: "only they would have us remember the poor, which very thing I was eager to do" (*Gal 2:10*). Remember the poor! Pope Francis, who repeatedly stresses the need to remember, to take care of the poor, admits that "keeping our eyes on the poor is difficult" (*Message*, §3). Yet this is what the apostles asked Paul to do. Paul uses the standard biblical word for the "poor" (*ptōchoi*), which means anyone who is without basic human resources and has to rely on others to survive. In the Bible, poverty is never an abstract concept; it concerns individuals or groups who literally do not have what they need to live. Paul's statement requires some further clarification.

The advice of the "pillars" of the Church to Paul regarding the "poor" is actually a reference to the *mother church* of Jerusalem. While it is possible that the label "poor" was used as a sort of spiritual identity for Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, another interpretation is more likely. Compared to Paul's churches in the Diaspora in the Greek-Roman world, which were mostly urban and quite wealthy, the Christians of Jerusalem were literally poor. Paul's churches included members of a broad spectrum of societies, from rich to poor, with a good number of artisans, merchants, and landowners who certainly had enough resources to live on.

In the context of the Galatians, Paul is pointing to the mother church of Jerusalem. He recognizes the disparity between "his" relatively wealthy Gentile churches and the Jerusalem community. So he gladly accepted the apostles' request and took up the "collection in favor of the saints" (1 *Cor 16:1*), one of the main aspects of his ministry for

about twenty years. Wherever Paul went to evangelize in the Mediterranean basin, he invited his listeners to contribute to this collection for the poor. He explains his reasons to the Romans, complimenting “his” churches that have freely contributed to his efforts to raise funds:

“At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem with aid for the saints. For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem; they were pleased to do it, and indeed they are in debt to them, for if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings” (*Rm* 15:25-27).

The Greek vocabulary of this passage is important. Paul speaks of “rendering a service” or “serving” (*diakoneō*), of achieving communion (*koinōnia*) by sharing resources with the poor (*ptōchoi*) who need material things (*sarkika*). These words show that Paul's outstretched hand was aimed at building the largest community of faith. But even the poor have something to share. Paul commends the church in Jerusalem for sharing their “spiritual goods” with the Gentile churches. In this way, Paul shows that his collection is not only an act of charity on the part of the richer churches, but part of a mutual sharing of each other's resources. The mother church has always served as an inspiration for Paul's communities. They, in turn, gave back what they could for the material well-being of that community. The vocabulary of this passage therefore revolves around the nature of the Christian community (*koinōnia*, which can also be translated as “communion”). It is a community of love in which each one's resources are generously shared.

In another passage, Paul explains the logic of the practice he encouraged in *his* churches to help the poor. It is based on God's example. God is the one who ultimately gives with the utmost generosity. When we stretch forth our hands to the poor, we follow God's example and this leads to thanksgiving. Paul describes this process with these words:

“And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that you may always have enough of everything and may provide in abundance for every good work. As it is written, “He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor; his righteousness endures for ever.” He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your resources and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way for great generosity, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God; for the rendering of this service not only supplies the wants of the saints but also overflows in many thanksgivings to God” (*2 Cor* 9:8-12).

Another aspect of Paul's concern for the poor is worth noting. The collection “for the saints” was so important that he wanted to deliver it in person (cf. *1 Cor* 16:4; *Rm* 15:25-28). He wanted to deliver it himself! When Christians reflect on the needs of the poor in any era, they often refer to those texts of Scripture that speak clearly and openly about caring for the poor. Therefore, we look for the Psalms, the Gospels (especially Luke, known as the “Gospel of the poor”), the wisdom literature. We seldom think of the Apostle Paul as a source of this teaching, because his letters have little to say on the subject. Yet the Holy Father himself calls attention to Paul's teaching by rightly linking generosity towards the poor with the community of love. In his *Message* for this Fourth World Day of the Poor, Pope Francis writes:

«This year's theme “Stretch forth your hand to the poor”, is thus a summons to responsibility and commitment as men and women who are part of our one human family. It encourages us to bear the burdens of the weakest, in accord with the words

of Saint Paul: “Through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’. [...] Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (*Gal 5:13-14; 6:2*).» (*Message*, §8).

This passage from the Letter to the Galatians is one of the few examples in which Paul explicitly mentions the teaching of Jesus; he even defines it as “the law of Christ”. Bearing one another’s burden is not an option for the true Christian. It is an obligation. It is also a sign of the love we have for those in need, who are the weakest or most vulnerable. In the image of the “helping hand” stretched out to the needy, we find a concrete realization of Jesus’ message, reinforced by St. Paul, to bear each other’s burdens out of love. As Pope Francis states, «A hand held out is a sign; a sign that immediately speaks of closeness, solidarity and love» (*Message*, §6).

Every day, in the city where I live, I see poor people on the street or in the subway. They are homeless and vulnerable people. Many suffer from mental illness; some are victims of terrible misfortune; others apparently prefer to live on the fringes of society and rely on outstretched hands to help them. Unfortunately, our secular institutions seem poorly equipped to solve this problem, despite our best intentions. We have to admit that the problem of poverty in the world does not lend itself to immediate solutions. Pope Francis himself admits it: «The Church certainly has no comprehensive solutions to propose, but by the grace of Christ she can offer her witness and her gestures of charity» (*Message*, §4). We Christians are at least invited to reflect on the Word of God, which demands of us a concrete response to the poor.

Even in the time of St. Paul, there was considerable poverty in the Christian communities, which could in no way be neglected or ignored by him. Contrary to what was believed, Paul did not ignore the poor. He took the opportunity to help the impoverished mother church of Jerusalem, probably for two reasons. First, he showed that he was grateful for the recognition of the Church leaders, such as Simon Peter (Cephas) and James the Lord’s brother, who allowed him to continue with his evangelizing mission on behalf of the Gentiles. Paul knew that this promoted the vision of a unified community in which the normal social distinctions between Gentiles or Jews, slaves or free, women and men - and I would add between “rich or poor” - no longer dominated (cf. *Gal 3:28*). Secondly, Paul also offered a concrete sign - an outstretched hand, we might say - indicating that “his” Gentile churches were ready to joyfully contribute to building the entire community by sharing their resources. Such a gesture was not mere charity. Paul considered it a sign of participation in communion (*koinōnia*) with the entire community, which in turn manifested the fulfillment of Jesus’ command to love one another. Reaching out to the poor is an essential act to building the community of love to which everyone is called.

Is prayed...

Psalm 41

*Happy are those who consider the poor;
the Lord delivers them in the day of trouble.*

*The Lord protects them and keeps them alive;
they are called happy in the land.
You do not give them up to the will of their enemies.*

*The Lord sustains them on their sickbed;
in their illness you heal all their infirmities.*

*As for me, I said, "O Lord, be gracious to me;
heal me, for I have sinned against you."*

*My enemies wonder in malice
when I will die, and my name perish.*

*And when they come to see me, they utter empty words,
while their hearts gather mischief;
when they go out, they tell it abroad.*

*All who hate me whisper together about me;
they imagine the worst for me.*

*They think that a deadly thing has fastened on me,
that I will not rise again from where I lie.*

*Even my bosom friend in whom I trusted,
who ate of my bread, has lifted the heel against me.*

*But you, O Lord, be gracious to me,
and raise me up, that I may repay them.*

*By this I know that you are pleased with me;
because my enemy has not triumphed over me.*

*But you have upheld me because of my integrity,
and set me in your presence forever.*

*Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel,
from everlasting to everlasting.
Amen and Amen.*

* * *

Open our eyes

Open our eyes, Lord,
so we can see You in our brothers and sisters.
Open our ears, Lord,
so we can hear the cries
of those who are hungry, cold, afraid and oppressed.
Open our hearts, Lord,
so we can learn to love one another as You love us.
Give us your Spirit again, Lord,
So we can become one heart and one soul, in Your name. Amen.

(St. Therese of Calcutta)

II Suggestion

Lectio Divina

Stretch forth your hand to the poor now!

The Word of God ...

... is listened to

Sir 7:27-30; 32-36

With all your heart honor your father, and do not forget the birth pangs of your mother. Remember that through your parents you were born; and what can you give back to them that equals their gift to you? With all your soul fear the Lord, and honor his priests. With all your might love your Maker, and do not forsake his ministers. Stretch forth your hand to the poor, so that your blessing may be complete. Give graciously to all the living, and withhold not kindness from the dead. Do not fail those who weep, but mourn with those who mourn. Do not shrink from visiting a sick man, because for such deeds you will be loved. In all you do, remember the end of your life, and then you will never sin.

...is meditated on

Before looking at the verses taken from Sirach, let's turn to the Gospel that helps us understand the Old Testament text. At the end of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus speaks of universal judgment (cf. *Mt 25: 31-46*). The scene is very simple, but suggestive: a shepherd divides his sheep, and puts the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. What is striking is a certain rhythm in the dialogue between the Son of God, who is veiled in the figure of the shepherd and the king, and the men gathered for judgment, represented by animal figures. The king, four times and always in the same order, repeats the six basic human needs that need to be filled: hunger, thirst, being a stranger, nakedness, sickness and imprisonment.

It is obvious that filling the six basic needs or not becomes an essential criterion for being included in the group of the just or the unjust. This criterion is already found in the Old Testament. Isaiah indicated it as the criterion of true fasting and, consequently, of true and consistent religiosity: "Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?" (58: 6-7).

While affirming the responsibility that each person has for his sins, the Prophet Ezekiel describes a series of behaviors, some to avoid, others to practice, so that the faithful become righteous and have life: "does not oppress any one, but restores to the debtor his pledge, commits no robbery, gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with a

garment, does not lend at interest or take any increase, withholds his hand from iniquity, executes true justice between man and man, walks in my statutes, and is careful to observe my ordinances—he is righteous, he shall surely live, says the Lord God” (18:7-9). Our text of Sirach, then, is just part of this series of writings, which calls for certain behavior towards people suffering because of their basic needs being violated (not filled), “Stretch forth your hand to the poor, so that your blessing may be complete. Do not shrink from visiting a sick man, because for such deeds you will be loved. In all you do, remember the end of your life, and then you will never sin” (7:32; 35-36). Also in this case the behavior that aims at filling the basic human needs becomes a criterion for being able to receive the fullness of God’s blessing and not falling into sin.

While the texts of the Old Testament focus mainly on the relationship between behavior towards the poor and God's blessing, the Gospel brings a revolutionary turn: “as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (*Mt 25:40*). God is no longer the guarantor of the relationship between a poor person and a rich person, eager to receive the blessing and be counted among the righteous. God identifies himself with the poor and entrusts himself into the hands of men. Chiara Lubich writes: “The fact that Jesus identifies with those in need is one of the highest and newest aspects of the Gospel message. When he became man, in fact, the Son of God “though he was rich ...became poor”. He came not to be served but to serve. He cured the sick, relieved those who were suffering and associated with those on the margins of society, certainly not because of their moral or spiritual superiority, but out of love. (*Word of life, November 1984*).

Thus we can fully understand the command of Sirach: “stretch forth your hand to the poor”. It is not just a simple command that guarantees blessing and eternal life, but it is a gesture that allows you to touch Jesus present in the poor through one of the six channels of entry: “for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me” (*Mt 25: 35-36*).

At this point it is also clear that, before stretching out your hand, you need to have eyes of love. They enable us to see not only a person in need, but also and above all Jesus who awaits our gesture: “In sick or suffering people, we must see Jesus nailed to the cross and not a parasite or an unproductive member” (*Diary, Saint Faustina Kowalska*). The watchful eye of a believer immediately glimpses with love how to reach, touch and bring relief to Jesus nailed in a needy person.

Often in biblical texts even things that are not explicitly expressed are important. In our case, we realize that Sirach does not say when we should extend our hand. Mark the Evangelist reports the words of Jesus: “For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you will, you can do good to them” (14:7). When to reach out to the poor, therefore, depends on our will. Too often, however, this phrase from the Gospel is used to justify one's inertia in helping the needy. In the meantime, we always have them with us ...

To be credible as Christians, we cannot escape this constant search for God who dwells in poor people and awaits our outstretched hand. We cannot waste even a second and we must hurry, because the perception of time varies according to the circumstances in which one finds oneself. We know these moments very well, when life suddenly slows down, when we receive a call with bad news and it seems that the earth has opened beneath our feet ... For the poor, time can quickly turn into despair, if they don't see a helping hand: “How long is the wait of the sick who are thirsty for a glass of water!” (St. Augustine, *En. In ps 36, d.1,10*). Stretch out your hand to the poor, now!

... is prayed

On your feastday,
let us pray to the Lord
to become more charitable
at the service of our brothers and sisters.
Thank you Lord
for the many graces and blessings
that you have placed in my life.
I offer you my heartfelt gratitude
for the countless gifts
that you offer me every day.
Lord, help me be aware
of the needs of my brothers and sisters,
and to answer those
who are poor and less fortunate
with generous expressions of charity,
kindness and care.
When, Lord,
I will finally be in your presence,
I would like to hear you say:
“Come, good and faithful servant,
share the joy of the Father,
for when you saw me hungry,
thirsty, naked, homeless,
sick and in prison,
you offered, in my name,
gifts in charity and love”.

St. Vincent de Paul (for his compassion, humility and generosity, is known as the “Great Apostle of Charity”)

* * *

Virgin Mary,
Queen of the Saints,
and model of holiness!
You now rejoice with the immense host
of those who have washed their garments
in the “blood of the Lamb” (*Rev. 7:14*).
You are the first of the saved,
the all Holy, the Immaculate Conception.
Help us overcome our mediocrity.
Put desire in our hearts
and the way of perfection.
Arouse in the Church,
for the good of the people of today,
a great spring of holiness.
(St. John Paul II)

Comment on Sir 4: 1-10 **«My Son, deprive not the poor ... »**

The theme of poverty is widespread in the panorama of the wisdom books. Together with Sirach, also in the Proverbs of Solomon and in Ecclesiastes, there are numerous references that show the constant commitment on the part of the sacred authors in the reflection that calls for caring for the needy, protecting the indigent and welcoming orphans. It is the path in the search for wisdom that is marked by a real practice of daily holiness and which leads to a ritual that celebrates the Just God and lover of justice. The literary genre of instruction is adopted by the wisdom authors as an effective stylistic way to impart those teachings that are useful for maturing in every reader the authentic fidelity to the Word of God that guides and illuminates man's path in the rigorous search for Wisdom.

The context close to the passage is Sir 3:1-4;10, which is characterized by the constant use of the name “son”, recipient of the instruction of the sage Ben Sira. A common terminology that is reflected in the conclusion by reference to the familial language of “father” and “mother”, semantically related to inclusion in the first verse that opens with the statement addressed to the “son”, needing to quench his thirst at the source of Divine Wisdom.

The text of Sir 4:1-10 is divided into two stanzas: in verses 1-6 the author describes what must be avoided in relationship to the poor. The following verses 7-10 are centered on the duties to the poor in the practice of social justice. Let's look in detail at the first subsection (vs.1-6).

In verses 1 and 2 we find the first instructions marked metrically in the form of semantic parallelism, where the second element clarifies the meaning of the first clause in increasing form. The first advice in negative form establishes the impossibility of depriving the poor of what is necessary to keep them alive. It is an invitation to charity that addresses the material order of the person. It is a sentence that highlights the destitution of the poor who find themselves deprived of the necessities to live. The Jewish culture includes bread, water and vegetables on the scale of primary needs, as a typical “kosher” diet, adapted to the rules established by the Torah. Like the Torah, food is also a gift of divine providence. Depriving the poor of their daily food is a serious crime that cries out for vengeance before God. The meaning of this wise advice is strengthened in the second part of the expression that involves the sense of sight. The eye of the pure man will not be able to be insensitive to the persuasive gaze of the needy who cry out against the unjust poverty to which they are slaves. The gaze of those who suffer is an efficacious prayer that moves the heart to compassion. And those who live in difficulty cannot be exasperated by further struggles. An echo of this sentence is the parable of the rich man that we find in the Gospel of Luke (cf. Lk 16: 19-31). The turning point of Luke's recounting is the rich man finding himself in Hades. Among the hellish torments he discovers the real cause of his eternal damnation: not wealth, but the inability to see that poor man named Lazarus who daily stood at the foot of his table, prostrate in the dust with the dogs, eager to feed himself with crumbs fallen to the ground. “And in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes, and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus in his bosom”. The rich man who meets the eyes of poor Lazarus sees in his eyes the reason for the condemnation. Too late to turn back, the sentence to be served is the perpetual vision of those who refused to see in life, for a limited time.

The material need of hunger reaches to the deepest destitution of an inner life that affects the heart, the center of human life. That of the poor is a heart affected by a sentimental sclerosis that leads to a pessimistic view of life. Withdrawn into oneself, devoid of a prospect of happiness opening to the gifts of creation, the needy lives in a dynamic of continuous search for attention that enables him to be recognized in order to remind himself that he exists. The heavy heart, the outstretched hand, the piercing gaze, the desperate prayer that rises to heaven are the images that the sacred author paints in verses 3 to 6 to outline the features of the typical beggar who appears in many pages of Scripture and which reflect the needs that are hidden in his inner being. The description of exteriority is completed with that of interiority: from the primary need for food which is limited to one aspect that only gives partial meaning to man's existence, we come to *cardiognosis*, knowledge of the heart, the place where the needy give an urgent plea for help, protection, care and the desire to live. And if the heart of man does not respond to the desires and expectations of those crying for help, with certainty, the answer comes from the heart of God who gets involved viscerally with the cry of those pleading who turn to him, because oppressed by social injustice that relegates him to the margins and leaves him lying prostrate in the dust because he has no strength to rise again. Listening to the cry of the poor and interventions aimed at restoring justice are characteristics of divine action.

The second section (vs 7-10), preceded by a recommendation inviting those in higher hierarchical position in the synagogue communities to obedience, is an encouragement to the disciple so that he learns to cultivate attention for the poor. In this perspective, the wise person who is compassionate to the poor, orphans and widows, lives in the love of God, more than what a mother has for her own children. The wise person expresses a way of life reminiscent of the divine. It is the typical attitude that makes one participate in the love of God, who is compassionate and full of goodness.

The next piece of advice is taken from what has already been expressed in verses 3 and 4, but this time with the technique of inverting the subject. It is no longer the poor who lift their eyes in search of the compassionate eyes of those who will take care of them, but on the contrary, they are the eyes of those who become neighbors and bend down to meet the eyes of the beggar who asks for help. The change of the gaze is indicated by the movement that goes from the top downwards. It is as if one is forced to prostrate before the gaze of the needy, from top downwards in a kenotic movement that imitates the lowering of Christ in the dynamics of the incarnation. It is the gesture that emulates that of Jesus bending over the adulterous woman, in need of God's forgiveness, it is the overthrowing of the thrones followed by the raising of the humble in the canticle of the Magnificat, it is God's bending over the miseries of the whole of mankind.

After the gaze, even the ear bends down to listen to the beating of a heavy heart, weary, hardened by the trials and sorrows of life at the limit of what is human. The exercise of social justice thus translates into a progressive and constant exercise of what the Law marks as the duties of an upright man who is guided by the light of faith.

The conclusion of the passage (v.10) expands the semantic field of familiar terms. The son, the custodian of wise instruction, by translating God's advice into his life, becomes a father for orphans (a category that specifies a significant feature of being needy), and a husband for their mother in order to reach the summit of his life: to receive the gift of divine sonship. The practice of mercy gains the support of God, who will fill the righteous with such love that it will exceed beyond measure the love that a mother has for her child.

Comment on Sir 7: 32-36

The tension upon attaining Wisdom that is bestowed from above as a shower of blessing and grace that waters the heart of every creature is reflected with extraordinary clarity in Sir 7: 32-36. Preceded by an earnest invitation to the fear of the Lord and to the honor reserved for his ministers, the verses that follow describe the liturgy celebrated by the just man who places at the center of his ritual, the unreserved offering of himself to support the needy poor person, managing to fill his destitution with acts of mercy and service. They seem to echo the verses of Psalm 51 that describe the dynamics of the ritual with attitudes of a contrite spirit, as a broken and humbled heart that God treasures and does not despise (Ps 51).

The author's use of the chiasmus technique in verses 32-33 is useful to relate the terms *poor-dead* and *blessing-generosity*. The message that lies behind what might appear to be a simple rhetorical device that borders on mere exegetical skill is rather suggestive for accurately reflecting on the theme of poverty, never alien to the sensitivity of the believer. The condition of the poor evokes a clear relationship with death; living in poverty means dealing with death every day. The enslavement of man to the condition of misery and insecurity tarnish the image of God stamped on the face of every creature, not bringing out the sacredness achieved by the ritual that each person offers to his fellow man, indispensable for celebrating the liturgy pleasing to the Lord. It follows that the gift of divine blessing comes from the generosity that each individual will have bestowed upon the poor.

How timely are the divine commands that Sirach gives to men of faith, to those who with a particular ministry in the church, to those who dedicate themselves to the service of the needy, to those who want to give meaning to life, to men of all times! A blessed life is built on acts of unconditional generosity: alleviate suffering, support the weakest, give dignity to those who have lost it, help those in need, encourage those who have lost hope; they are the “sacraments” that each person is called to celebrate to make the world a more welcoming home, where no one feels excluded and unwanted. The possibility of dedicating oneself to the poor can never be conditioned by time, by personal interests, by projects not grounded in divine will, by an eccentric ministry that risks putting man's powerless self at the center, relegating the omnipotence of God to the edges. Reaching out to the poor will be a gesture of real solidarity when one has the courage to value the experience of individual poverty. Only the poor can see with compassion one who is poor. Learning to consider ourselves poor means recognizing the saving actions that God has done in our life. Poor like the Israelites fleeing from the Egyptians, saved by the outstretched arm of Moses over the waters of the sea, poor like the people of Israel in battle, supported by the arms of Moses raised to heaven, poor like that man who stretched out his hand to Jesus, who healed him.

Reaching out to the poor is also the gesture that seals the celebration of forgiveness of those who approach the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The life of faith grows in the sharing of poverty; it is realized in accompanying the weakest, in supporting the wavering ones, in taking on the burdens of others. Sirach clarifies these images that suggest the vitality of an inclusive community, with three negative and three positive actions, in verses 34-36. The first takes into account those who are in tears: “Do not fail those who weep, but mourn with those who mourn” (cf. Sir 7:34). The period of compulsory isolation (lockdown) that the pandemic has forced us to live has amplified social distancing, even

depriving us of the possibility of being able to console those who mourn the death of loved ones. Learning the difficult art of *co-suffering* is a task from which no one is exempt: “but mourn with those who mourn” (cf. Sir 7:34). A corporal work of mercy is to visit the sick: “Do not shrink from visiting a sick man” (cf. Sir 7:35). The reference to the sick that Sirach expresses as a worship pleasing to God reaches its peak in the famous Gospel passage of Matthew in chapter 25. Jesus himself identifies himself with the evocative image of the sick, who lets himself be visited: “I was sick and you visited me” (cf. Mt 25:36). Freed from the alluring temptations of self-sufficiency and marginalizing pride, man becomes aware of the intimate creaturely weakness that leads him to identify with those sick people who invoke the aid of the heavenly physician, in a communion of human misery that is exercised in solidarity with his fellow men. (cf Lk 5:32).

Recognizing yourself as sick can become the beginning of a healing process that is realized in the urgency to love and in the desire to be loved. The conclusion of the passage offers a pearl of biblical wisdom that can be adapted by any individual. “In all your actions, remember your end”. The Greek text suggests a double translation of the term “end”. It is to be understood as a synonym for death. Remembering death, frees man from the temptations that lurk in the depths of the heart and which, like weeds, are deep rooted and difficult to eradicate. The most common anthropological deviations are the possibility of doing without God, the risk of being self-sufficient, of being able to overpower one's neighbor lightly, of abusing the weakness of others, of enjoying life to the “end”, even excluding the certainty of death. The second interpretation of the term “end” has a positive outcome: “in all your actions, remember your end”. It is well understood that the life of every man has a clear and definitive direction. The way forward is the relationship with others and the goal is to love them in order to sincerely love God. All life takes on an agapic movement. The preferential way to reach the fullness of life is love of the poor towards whom one holds out his hand.

For a church that shares poverty

Who are the poor? Sirach's answer is clear: those who do not have what is needed to live and do not even possess the essentials. Protection of the needy is extensively treated in the pages of the Bible; they have the rights to be protected from abuse by the powerful, protection from oppression by the wicked, to pay for basic needs, not to mention the establishment of a relationship that enables them to live a life of dignity with respect for their human condition. Respect for ethical rules and attention paid to the weakest members generates a more just and supportive society, more human and united in communion. From Ben Sira to the present day, these warnings have in themselves a perennial value and can be applied positively in a time like ours that is so aggressive towards the poor.

A mature theological-pastoral reflection must put the question of poverty at the center. The church, which lives in a historical context of exasperating consumerism, understands the great risk of a growing individualistic culture that cultivates negative values of social marginalization. Selfish isolation does not leave enough space to cultivate the search for closeness that enhances and supports those who are in a condition of poverty and absolute insecurity. Individualism creates a gradual impoverishment of one's inner life, with the consequent hardening of the heart that generates Christians who forget the poor and who voluntarily deprive themselves of a positive relationship with God who loves justice. Pastoral care for the poor arouses in the Church a renewed interest in reactivating a missionary dynamic that brings the Gospel message to everyone, without exception and social differences, recognizing the needy as the privileged ones of the Gospel. It is urgent that the speech that Jesus gave in the synagogue of Nazareth resound in the hearts of

believers: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor” (cfr. Lk 4:18).

The first aspect that highlights the attention that the Church must pay to the poor is accompanied by a second one of no less importance: the Gospel for the poor is also the Gospel of the poor, for which the privileged recipients are also the subjects who actively work in evangelization. The new evangelization is called to retrace the existential passages of charity and humility in a perennial following of the poor Christ. It is not just any following, but a process of real conversion sustained by fidelity to the Gospel. Following Jesus means living in the spirit of the Beatitudes and this involves not a small circle of believers, but the entire people of God. A culture of sharing needs to be promoted so that the church does not act only for the poor, but lives with the poor. Indeed, the values of poverty remain the noblest form with which to proclaim the Gospel. They are witnesses of the wealth of God's Kingdom.

Sharing in poverty does not, however, invalidate the commitment to fight against all forms of misery and discrimination that are the result of selfish decisions. Pastoral care *with* and *for* the poor is intrinsically linked to the promotion of peace in order to defeat the thirst of oppression in all its forms, through an active contribution on the part of Christians who rediscover in themselves, builders of a world that is more just and free from all social discord.

The church receives a precise direction from its teacher that is impressed on its followers, that of having to live not for itself, but for the salvation of the world, especially for those who feel excluded, marginalized and deprived of the beauty that should shine on their faces because it reflects the image of God. It is the time to believe courageously in the construction of a pastoral ministry of closeness, fostering reception centers for the homeless, caritas canteens, counseling centers, in continuity with the example of Christ who lived and offered his life for the poor and suffering. The salvation of the world, today more than ever, is realized in commitment to the needy and the poor. All this involves a series of coherent and consequential choices. Starting with the preferential option of a lifestyle that aims at simplicity. It is necessary to learn to become friends with others, giving yourself to those most in need that you see around you, if you have the courage to do so. There is no more effective pastoral plan than the concretization of love and the actualization of that commandment which sanctions the perennial newness of the Gospel and of every saving proclamation: to love God and neighbor. The model to follow is the crucified Christ from whom we can learn to live in conformity with his intimate messianic and prophetic nature and this always brings us back to the proclamation of the Gospel as good news to the poor.

Prayer Vigil

“Stretch forth your hand to the poor” (Sir 7:32)

Introduction

Stretch forth your hand is a sign: a sign that immediately speaks of closeness, solidarity, love, writes Pope Francis in his Message for this Fourth World Day of the Poor. The aim of this prayer vigil is to enact, pray about and put into practice the sign of the outstretched hand.

In the first part, the guiding verse from the book of Sirach from which the theme of the day is taken, urges us to carry out concrete actions towards the needy. The outstretched hand is a very eloquent gesture that shows and expresses the different dynamics that a person or a community can put into practice in favor of the poor.

In the second part we are reminded that our actions towards the poor begin with the outstretched hand of the Lord, who first reaches out to us.

In conclusion, it would be good to briefly summarize the dual meaning of God's outstretched hand towards man and man's outstretched hand towards his neighbor

Note that the texts selected in this resource are only suggestions. To adapt the vigil to the particular needs of a specific community (parish, hospital chapel, monastery, etc.), songs can be selected for each part. To go into greater depth with the recurring themes in the biblical texts chosen, another meditation could be prepared, or some testimonies could be selected, depending on the needs and possibilities of the community that is celebrating the vigil. Before the final blessing, it is suggested that the priest himself or the faithful add another prayer of intercession that is focused on the various situations in which the poor live.

At the discretion of those organizing the vigil, the suggested biblical passages can also be changed to emphasize other aspects of the outstretched hand. For example, Ps 89 (the Lord accompanies his people with his strong hand); several gospel passages narrate healings performed with the hand (Mk 1:40-41; Mk 5:21-43; Mk 1:31; Mt 8:15; Mk 7:33, Mk 8:23-25); Peter heals a cripple, taking him by the hand (Acts 3:1-10). The vigil could take place with the Blessed Sacrament exposed.

The Priest exposes the Blessed Sacrament as usual followed by a song and an introductory word.

First part - man stretches out his hand

With all your heart honor your father, and do not forget the birth pangs of your mother. Remember that through your parents you were born; and what can you give back to them that equals their gift to you? With all your soul fear the Lord, and honor his priests. With all your might love your Maker, and do not forsake his ministers. Fear the Lord and honor the priest, Stretch forth your hand to the poor, so that your blessing may be complete. Give graciously to all the living, and withhold not kindness from the dead. Do not fail those who weep, but mourn with those who mourn. Do not shrink from visiting a sick man, because for such deeds you will be loved. In all you do, remember the end of your life, and then you will never sin.

Meditation and/or testimony

A presentation (a collage of photos and/or videos) could also be prepared to illustrate different hands extended to the poor materially and spiritually, while reading some passages from Pope Francis' Message for the Day of the Poor, such as:

“The ability to stretch forth our hand shows that we possess an innate capacity to act in ways that give meaning to life. How many outstretched hands do we see every day! Sadly, it is more and more the case that the frenetic pace of life sucks us into a whirlwind of indifference, to the point that we no longer know how to recognize the good silently being done each day and with great generosity all around us.”

“A hand held out is a sign; a sign that immediately speaks of closeness, solidarity and love. In these months, when the whole world was prey to a virus that brought pain and death, despair and bewilderment, how many outstretched hands have we seen! The outstretched hands of physicians who cared about each patient and tried to find the right cure. The outstretched hands of nurses who worked overtime, for hours on end, to look after the sick. The outstretched hands of administrators who procured the means to save as many lives as possible. The outstretched hands of pharmacists who at personal risk responded to people’s pressing needs. The outstretched hands of priests whose hearts broke as they offered a blessing. The outstretched hands of volunteers who helped people living on the streets and those with a home yet nothing to eat. The outstretched hands of men and women who worked to provide essential services and security. We could continue to speak of so many other outstretched hands, all of which make up a great litany of good works. Those hands defied contagion and fear in order to offer support and consolation.”

“Stretch forth your hand to the poor” challenges the attitude of those who prefer to keep their hands in their pockets and to remain unmoved by situations of poverty in which they are often complicit. Indifference and cynicism are their daily food. What a difference from the generous hands we have described! If they stretch out their hands, it is to touch computer keys to transfer sums of money from one part of the world to another, ensuring the wealth of an elite few and the dire poverty of millions and the ruin of entire nations. Some hands are outstretched to accumulate money by the sale of weapons that others, including those of children, use to sow death and poverty. Other hands are outstretched to deal doses of death in dark alleys in order to grow rich and live in luxury and excess, or to

quietly pass a bribe for the sake of quick and corrupt gain. Others still, parading a sham respectability, lay down laws which they themselves do not observe.”

Song

A silent prayer.

The following can be recited:

It's Christmas every time we smile at a brother or sister and offer a helping hand.

It's Christmas every time we remain in silence to listen to someone.

It's Christmas every time we reject those principles that marginalize the oppressed.

It's Christmas every time we hope with those who despair in material or spiritual poverty.

It's Christmas every time you humbly accept your own limits and your own weakness.

It's Christmas every time you allow the Lord to be born again to give Him to others.

S. Theresa of Calcutta

Second part-God stretches out his hand

From the Gospel according to Matthew

Mt 14: 22-33

[After the crowd had eaten] Then he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up into the hills by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but the boat by this time was many furlongs distant from the land, beaten by the waves; for the wind was against them. And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, “It is a ghost!” And they cried out for fear. But immediately he spoke to them, saying, “Take heart, it is I; have no fear.”

And Peter answered him, “Lord, if it is you, bid me come to you on the water.” He said, “Come.” So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus; but when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, “Lord, save me.” Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, “O man of little faith, why did you doubt?”

And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

Meditation and/or testimony

The following text by Pope Francis given during the *Angelus* on 10 August 2014 is proposed:

“This story is a beautiful icon of the faith of the Apostle Peter. In the voice of Jesus who tells him: “Come!”, he recognizes the echo of the first encounter on the shore of that very lake, and right away, once again, he leaves the boat and goes toward the Teacher. And he walks on the waters! The faithful and ready response to the Lord’s call always enables one to achieve extraordinary things. But Jesus himself told us that we are capable of performing miracles with our faith, faith in Him, faith in his word, faith in his voice. Peter however begins to sink the moment he looks away from Jesus and he allows himself to be overwhelmed by the hardships around him. But the Lord is always there, and when Peter calls him, Jesus saves him from danger. Peter’s character, with his passion and his weaknesses, can describe our faith: ever fragile and impoverished, anxious yet victorious, Christian faith walks to meet the Risen Lord, amid the world’s storms and dangers.”

“This is an effective image of the Church: a boat which must brave the storms and sometimes seems on the point of capsizing. What saves her is not the skill and courage of her crew members, but faith which allows her to walk, even in the dark, amid hardships. Faith gives us the certainty of Jesus’ presence always beside us, of his hand which grasps us to pull us back from danger. We are all on this boat, and we feel secure here despite our limitations and our weaknesses. We are safe especially when we are ready to kneel and worship Jesus, the only Lord of our life. This is what our Mother, Our Lady always reminds us. We turn to her trustingly.”

Song
A silent prayer.

The following can be recited:

Stretch out your hand to us, Lord, and take hold of us.
Help us to love as you love.
Teach us to leave behind all that is passing,
to be a source or reassurance to those around us,
to give freely to all those in need. Amen
(Pope Francis)

Brief concluding exhortation that summarizes the vigil and directs the prayer to the Lord.

The Prayer to the Virgin of the Poor of Banneux follows:

Virgin of the Poor,
pointing to the source
reserving it for the sick
showing your concern for those who suffer,
come and alleviate our suffering,
lighten the suffering of those in pain,
get all the graces you need

to gently carry the daily cross
and pray, O Consoler of the afflicted,
for all those in need.

Virgin of the Poor,
who desired the erection of a small chapel
at the place of the apparitions,
teach us to be living stones of the Church,
bless the pope, bishops, priests,
deacons and all Christian people.
You, who are the Mother of the Church,
let our Christian communities
be docile to the action of the Holy Spirit,
submissive to the Word of God,
faithful to the Magisterium, dedicated to service,
free from any vested interest,
persevering in prayer and fraternal communion.

Virgin of the Poor,
O Blessed among all women,
we want to be blessed by you today,
in particular, and for all the days of our life;
lay your hands upon us,
on all devoted to you and on the whole world.
We implore you: never let us lack
your Maternal care,
O mother of the Savior,
Mother of God. Thank you!

The priest ends the vigil with the blessing of the Blessed Sacrament as usual.

PRAYER OF THE OUR FATHER

Presider:

Brothers and sisters, after having listened to the words of the Lord and of the Church, aware of the need to always stretch out our hands to the poor in order to experience the joy of mutual acceptance, we invoke God the Father with the words that our Lord Jesus taught us:

All:

*Our Father, Who art in heaven,
hallowed be Thy name;
Thy kingdom come;
Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those who trespass against us;*

*and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
Amen.*

Prayer

Presider

Let us pray.
O God, help of those who suffer and comfort of the poor,
by following the example of your Son Jesus Christ
you call us to love our brothers,
to hear their cry,
to be a sign of your hope that never disappoints,
fill us with your merciful love,
so that we can respond generously to the needs
of those who knock on the door of our heart.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, forever and ever.

Respond: Amen.

Blessing

The Priest with his hands extended over the Assembly says:

O God our Father, your mercy is limitless,
support these children of yours so that guided by Your Word
they may never lose their way along the path of love that passes
through the hearts of those marked by suffering and need,
May Your Spirit give them the strength, courage and tenacity to stretch forth their hands
towards all who are in need.
Through Christ our Lord.

Respond: Amen

And may the blessing of Almighty God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
descend upon you and remain with you forever.

Respond: Amen

Dismissal:

Presider: Let us bless the Lord.

Respond: Thanks be to God

Or it is possible to continue with

EXPOSITION OF THE BLESSED SACRAMENT AND ADORATION

While exposing the Blessed Sacrament the following hymn is sung:

ADORO TE DEVOTE

Choir:

1. Adoro te devote, latens Deitas,
quae sub his figuris vere latitas:
tibi se cor meum totum subiicit,
quia te contemplans totum deficit.

Assembly:

2. Visus, tactus, gustus in te fallitur,
sed auditu solo tuto creditur:
credo quidquid dixit Dei Filius:
nil hoc verbo Veritatis verius.

Choir:

3. In cruce latebat sola Deitas,
at hic latet simul et humanitas:
ambo tamen credens atque confitens,
peto quod petivit latro poenitens.

Assembly:

4. Plagas, sicut Thomas, non intueor:
Deum tamen meum te confiteor;
fac me tibi semper magis credere,
in te spem habere, te diligere.

Choir:

5. O memoriale mortis Domini!
Panis vivus vitam praestans homini!
Praesta meae menti de te vivere,
et te illi semper dulce sapere.

Assembly:

6. Pie pellicane, Iesu Domine!
Me immundum munda tuo Sanguine:
cuius una stilla salvum facere
totum mundum quit ab omni scelere.

Choir:

7. Iesu, quem velatum nunc aspicio,
oro fiat illud quod tam sitio:
ut te revelata cernens facie,
visu sim beatus tuae gloriae.

Choir and Assembly:

Amen.

Silence for adoration and personal prayer.

Litany prayer

- Reader:* Lord, Love is patient,
All: give us the patience to know how to face each day.
- Reader:* Lord, Love is kind,
All: help us to always want his good before mine.
- Reader:* Lord, Love is not envious,
All: teach us to rejoice at every success.
- Reader:* Lord, Love is not boastful,
All: remind us not to reprimand him for what I do for him.
- Reader:* Lord, Love is not proud,
All: give us the courage to say: "I was wrong".
- Reader:* Lord, Love does not lack respect,
All: let us see your face in his face.
- Reader:* Lord, Love does not seek its own way,
All: blow into our lives the breeze of gratitude.
- Reader:* Lord, Love does not get angry,
All: banish gestures and words that hurt.
- Reader:* Lord, Love takes no account of offences received,
All: reconcile us in the pardon that forgets the wrongs..
- Reader:* Lord, Love does not rejoice in injustice,
All: open our hearts to the needs of those around us.

Reader: Lord Love rejoices in the truth,
Alli: guide our steps to you who are Way, Truth and Life.

Il lettore: Lord, Love bears all things,
Tutti: help us to fill with Love the days we live together.

Il lettore: Lord, Love believes all things,
Tutti: help us believe that Love can move mountains.

Il lettore: Lord, Love hopes all things,
Tutti: help us to hope in Love beyond all hope.

GIFT OF FINEST WHEAT
Or another suitable hymn

Choir:
You satisfy the hungry heart
with gift of finest wheat.
Come give to us, O saving Lord,
The bread of life to eat.

1. As when the shepherd calls his sheep
They know and heed his voice
So when you call your family Lord
They follow and rejoice.

Assembly:
You satisfy the hungry heart
with gift of finest wheat.
Come give to us, O saving Lord,
The bread of life to eat.

Choir:
2. With joyful lips, we sing to you
Our praise and gratitude
That you should count us worthy Lord
To share this Heavenly food

Assembly:
You satisfy the hungry heart
with gift of finest wheat.

Come give to us, O saving Lord,
The bread of life to eat.

Choir:
3. The mystery of Your presence Lord
No mortal tongue can tell
Whom all the world cannot contain
Comes in our hearts to dwell.

Assembly:
You satisfy the hungry heart
with gift of finest wheat.
Come give to us, O saving Lord,
The bread of life to eat.

Choir.
4. You give Yourself to us o Lord
Then selfless let us be
To serve each other in Your name
In truth and charity.

Choir and Assembly:
You satisfy the hungry heart
with gift of finest wheat.
Come give to us, O saving Lord,
The bread of life to eat.

At the end of the hymn, or another Eucharistic hymn, there is a brief moment of silence for personal prayer.

EUCCHARISTIC BENEDICTION

TANTUM ERGO

Choir:

1. Tantum ergo sacramentum
veneremur cernui,
et antiquum documentum
novo cedat ritui;
praestet fides supplementum
sensum defectui.

1. Down in adoration falling,
Lo! the sacred Host we hail,
Lo! o'er ancient forms departing
Newer rites of grace prevail;
Faith for all defects supplying,
Where the feeble senses fail.

Assembly:

2. Genitori Genitoque
Laus et iubilatio,
salus, honor, virtus quoque
sit et benedictio;
procedenti ab utroque
compar sit laudatio.

2. To the everlasting Father,
And the Son Who reigns on high
With the Holy Spirit proceeding
Forth from each eternally,
Be salvation, honor, blessing,
Might and endless majesty.

Choir and Assembly:

Amen.

Prayer

Presider:

Oremus.

Deus, qui nobis sub sacramento mirabili
passionis tuae memoriam reliquisti,
tribue, quaesumus,
ita nos Corporis et Sanguinis tui
sacra mysteria venerari,
ut redemptionis tuae fructum
in nobis iugiter sentiamus.
Qui vivis et regnas in saecula saeculorum.
R/. Amen.

Let us pray.

Lord Jesus Christ, you gave us
the Eucharist as the memorial of your
suffering and death. May our worship of
this sacrament of your body and blood
help us to experience the salvation you won
for us and the peace of the kingdom where
live with the Father and the Holy Spirit,
One God, forever and ever.
Amen.

The Presider blesses the assembly with the Blessed Sacrament.

Acclamations

The choir intones and the assembly repeats:

1. Benedictus Deus.
2. Benedictum Nomen Sanctum eius.
3. Benedictus Iesus Christus, verus Deus et verus homo.
4. Benedictum Nomen Iesu.
5. Benedictum Cor eius sacratissimum.
6. Benedictus Sanguis eius pretiosissimus.
7. Benedictus Iesus in sanctissimo altaris Sacramento.
8. Benedictus Sanctus Spiritus, Paraclitus.
9. Benedicta excelsa Mater Dei, Maria sanctissima.
10. Benedicta sancta eius et immaculata Conceptio.
11. Benedicta eius gloriosa Assumptio.
12. Benedictum nomen Mariae, Virginis et Matris.
13. Benedictus sanctus Ioseph, eius castissimum Sponsus.
14. Benedictus Deus in Angelis suis, et in Sanctis suis.

Amen.

1. Blessed be God.
2. Blessed be His Holy Name.
3. Blessed be Jesus Christ, true God and true Man.
4. Blessed be the Name of Jesus.
5. Blessed be His Most Sacred Heart.
6. Blessed be His Most Precious Blood.
7. Blessed be Jesus in the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar.
8. Blessed be the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete.
9. Blessed be the great Mother of God, Mary most Holy.
10. Blessed be her Holy and Immaculate Conception.
11. Blessed be her Glorious Assumption.
12. Blessed be the name of Mary, Virgin and Mother.
13. Blessed be St. Joseph, her most chaste spouse.
14. Blessed be God in His Angels and in His Saints.

Amen.

Song while the Blessed Sacrament is being reposed

Song of reposition

Psalm 116

Choir:

1. Laudate Dominum, omnes gentes;
laudate eum, omnes populi.

1. Praise the Lord, all you nations;
praise him, all you people.

Assembly:

2. Quoniam confirmata est super nos
misericordia eius,
et veritas Domini manet in aeternum.

2. because strong is his love for us and
the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever.

Choir:

3. Gloria Patri et Filio,
et Spiritui Sancto.

3. Glory be to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit.

Assembly:

4. Sicut erat in principio,
et nunc, et semper,
et in saecula saeculorum. Amen.

4. As it was in the beginning
is now and ever shall be
world without end. Amen.

Marian antiphon

SALVE, REGINA

Choir and Assembly:

Salve, Regina,
Mater misericordiae,
vita, dulcedo et spes nostra, salve.
Ad te clamamus, exsules filii Evae.

Ad te suspiramus gementes et flentes
in hac lacrimarum valle.
Eia ergo, advocata nostra,
illos tuos misericordes oculos ad nos converte.
Et Iesum, benedictum fructum ventris tui,
nobis, post hoc exsilium, ostende.
O clemens, o pia, o dulcis Virgo Maria!

*Hail Holy Queen,
Mother of Mercy!
Our life, our sweetness and our hope!
To thee do we cry, poor banished children
of Eve,
to thee do we send up our sighs,
Mourning and weeping in this valley of tears.
Turn, then, most gracious advocate,
Thine eyes of mercy toward us;
and after this our exile show unto us the
Blessed fruit of thy womb Jesus;
O clement, o loving,
O sweet virgin Mary!*

Rosary of the poor

Stretch forth your hand to the poor

How is the Rosary prayed?

Presider: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Respond: *Amen.*

Presider: O God come to my assistance.

Respond: *O Lord, make haste to help me.*

Presider: Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.

Respond: *As it was in the beginning is now and will be forever. Amen.*

For each decade the “mystery” is announced, for example, in the first mystery we contemplate:

“the Annunciation of the Angel to Mary”.

After a brief pause for reflection, an Our Father, ten Hail Marys and a Glory be are said.

An invocation and a prayer can be added to each decade of the rosary; here we have taken them from the Novena to Our Lady of the Poor of Banneux.

At the end of the Rosary the Litany or other Marian prayers are recited.

Introduction

From the Message of Pope Francis for the Fourth World Day of the Poor

“Prayer to God and solidarity with the poor and suffering are inseparable. In order to perform an act of worship acceptable to the Lord, we have to recognize that each person, even the poorest and most contemptible, is made in the image of God. From this awareness comes the gift of God’s blessing, drawn by the generosity we show to the poor. Time devoted to prayer can never become an alibi for neglecting our neighbor in need. In fact the very opposite is true: the Lord’s blessing descends upon us and prayer attains its goal when accompanied by service to the poor.”

Presider: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit

Respond: *Amen*

Presider: O God come to my assistance

Respond: *O Lord make haste to help me.*

Presider: Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.

Respond: *As it was in the beginning is now and will be forever. Amen.*

First Mystery
You Lord are my only good

“For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing; not knowing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.” (Rev 3:17)

From the Book of Proverbs (30:7)

Two things I ask of thee;
deny them not to me before I die:
Remove far from me falsehood and lying;
give me neither poverty nor riches;
feed me with the food that is needful for me,
lest I be full, and deny thee,
and say, “Who is the Lord?”
or lest I be poor, and steal,
and profane the name of my God.

From the Message of Pope Francis for the Fourth World Day of the Poor

“Encountering the poor and those in need constantly challenges us and forces us to think. How can we help to eliminate or at least alleviate their marginalization and suffering? How can we help them in their spiritual need? The Christian community is called to be involved in this kind of sharing and to recognize that it cannot be delegated to others. In order to help the poor, we ourselves need to live the experience of evangelical poverty”.

Our Father, 10 Hail Marys, Glory be....

*O Mary, Mother of the Poor.
Pray for us.*

Let us Pray: Virgin of the Poor, accompany us to Jesus, the only source of grace and teach us to be docile to the Holy Spirit, so that the fire of love that he came to bring for the advent of his Kingdom may flare up.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen

Or: Virgin Mary, light of those who walk in darkness, support the steps of those who are exploited and humiliated in their dignity, so that they can live in the certainty that God is not indifferent to the fate of his children.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Second Mystery
I look for you my Lord, my hope

«Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, who do his commands; seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you may be hidden on the day of the wrath of the Lord». (Zeph 2:3)

Let us listen to the Word of God from the Book of Sirach (4:1-4,8)

“My son, deprive not the poor of his living, and do not keep needy eyes waiting. Do not add to the troubles of an angry mind, nor delay your gift to a beggar. Do not reject an afflicted suppliant, nor turn your face away from the poor. Incline your ear to the poor, and answer him peaceably and gently”.

From the Message of Pope Francis for the Fourth World Day of the Poor

“We cannot feel “all right” when any member of the human family is left behind and in the shadows. The silent cry of so many poor men, women and children should find the people of God at the forefront, always and everywhere, in efforts to give them a voice, to protect and support them in the face of hypocrisy and so many unfulfilled promises, and to invite them to share in the life of the community”.

Our Father, 10 Hail Marys, Glory be....

O Mary, Mother of the Poor.

Pray for us.

Let us Pray: Virgin of the Poor, you said: “Believe in me, I will believe in you”, we thank you for granting us your trust. Make us capable of choices in conformity with the Gospel, help us use our freedom in mutual service and in the love of Christ for the glory of the Father. Amen

Or Virgin Mary, support of those who hope in you, keep in your heart all those who are forced to leave their land, so that they may find acceptance in the solidarity of others. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Third Mystery

Raise me up Lord, do not forsake me

“He raises the poor from the dust, and lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make them sit with princes, with the princes of his people”. (Ps 113:7).

Let us listen to the Word of God from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah (14:30,32)

“And the first-born of the poor will feed, and the needy lie down in safety; “The Lord has founded Zion, and in her the afflicted of his people find refuge”.

From the Message of Pope Francis for the Fourth World Day of the Poor

“The ability to stretch forth our hand shows that we possess an innate capacity to act in ways that give meaning to life. How many outstretched hands do we see every day! Sadly, it is more and more the case that the frenetic pace of life sucks us into a whirlwind of indifference, to the point that we no longer know how to recognize the good silently being done each day and with great generosity all around us. Only when something happens that upsets the course of our lives do our eyes become capable of seeing the goodness of the

saints “next door”, of “those who, living in our midst, reflect God’s presence” (Gaudete et Exsultate, 7), but without fanfare.”

Our Father, 10 Hail Marys, Glory....

O Mary, Mother of the Poor.

Pray for us.

Let us pray: Virgin of the Poor, save the nations: obtain for us the guidance of wise rulers and the grace that all peoples, reconciled with each other and in agreement, form one fold under one shepherd.

Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Or: Virgin Mary, consoler of the sick and the disheartened, take care of those who today live in precarious and marginalized situations, so that, always trusting in the Lord, they may reopen their hearts to hope.

Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Fourth Mystery

Lord make me a witness of the joy of the Gospel

“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted, he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound” (Is 61:1)

Let us listen to the Word of the Lord from the Gospel according to Luke (6:20-23)

“Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you that hunger now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you that weep now, for you shall laugh. Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you and revile you, and cast out your name as evil, on account of the Son of man! Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven”.

From the Message of Pope Francis for the Fourth World Day of the Poor

Generosity that supports the weak, consoles the afflicted, relieves suffering and restores dignity to those stripped of it, is a condition for a fully human life. The decision to care for the poor, for their many different needs, cannot be conditioned by the time available or by private interests, or by impersonal pastoral or social projects. The power of God’s grace cannot be restrained by the selfish tendency to put ourselves always first.

Keeping our gaze fixed on the poor is difficult, but more necessary than ever if we are to give proper direction to our personal life and the life of society. It is not a matter of fine words but of a concrete commitment inspired by divine charity”.

Our Father, 10 Hail Marys, Glory be....

O Mary, Mother of the Poor.

Pray for us.

Let us pray: Virgin of the Poor, comfort the sick with your presence; teach us to carry our daily cross with Jesus and let us loyally commit ourselves to the service of the poor and the suffering.

Amen

Or: Virgin Mary, heart open and ready to welcome the hungry and those who hunger and thirst for justice, we present to you our exploited and humiliated brothers and sisters: make us attentive to their needs and ready to walk with them.

Amen

Fifth mystery

Lord, grant that I may live in communion with you and my brothers and sisters

“Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. (Acts 4:32-35)

Let us listen to the Word of the Lord from the Gospel according to Matthew (25:34-36)

“Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me’”.

From the Message of Pope Francis for the Fourth World Day of the Poor

“In this journey of daily encounter with the poor, the Mother of God is ever at our side. More than any other, she is the Mother of the Poor. The Virgin Mary knows well the difficulties and sufferings of the marginalized, for she herself gave birth to the Son of God in a stable. Due to the threat of Herod, she fled to another country with Joseph her spouse and the child Jesus. For several years, the Holy Family lived as refugees. May our prayer to Mary, Mother of the Poor, unite these, her beloved children, with all those who serve them in Christ’s name. And may that prayer enable outstretched hands to become an embrace of shared and rediscovered fraternity”.

Let us pray: Virgin of the Poor, we believe in you and, trusting in your maternal intercession, we abandon ourselves to your protection. We entrust to you the path that the Church is following in this third millennium, the moral and spiritual growth of young people, religious, priestly and missionary vocations and the work of the new evangelization.
Amen

Or: Virgin Mary, welcoming womb of those who live in solitude and abandonment, do not allow any of your children to suffer from a lack of warmth and friendship but find brothers and sisters who are willing to welcome them and offer them a friendly word.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen

Hail Holy Queen

Hail Holy Queen, mother of mercy:
our life, our sweetness, and our hope,
To thee do we cry,
poor banished children of Eve.
To thee do we send up our sighs,
mourning and weeping
in this valley of tears.
Turn then, most gracious advocate,
thine eyes of mercy
toward us.
And after this our exile,
show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus.
O clement, O loving, O sweet
Virgin Mary.

Litany (Mt 5:1-12)

| | |
|---|---------------------------|
| Mary, Mother of the poor in spirit, | graciously hear us O Lord |
| Mary, Mother of the afflicted | “ |
| Mary, Mother of the meek | “ |
| Mary, Mother of those who hunger and thirst for justice | ” |
| Mary, Mother of the merciful | ” |
| Mary Mother of the pure in heart | ” |
| Mary Mother of peacemakers | ” |
| Mary Mother of the persecuted | “ |

Let us pray

Lord Jesus, our brother, we pray for the poor,
for the sick, for the elderly, the excluded.
For those who are hungry and have no bread, but also for those who have bread and are not hungry.
For those who see themselves being overtaken by everyone,
for the exploited, alcoholics, prostitutes.
For those who are alone, for those who are tired.
Free the believers, O Lord,
from thinking that a gesture of charity is enough to heal so many sufferings.
We will always have the poor with us:
they are the sign of our poverty as travelers,
symbol of our disappointments, remnant of our despair.
We will always have them with us, indeed, within us.

Grant O Lord to your people on the way
the honor of seeing those who have stopped us along the road
and to be ready to shake his hand to get him back on the road
in the certainty that those who hope in you will not be disappointed.
Amen.

(don Tonino Bello, Words of love)

Or:

O God, our merciful Father,
nowadays many of our brothers and sisters are abandoned by their families and society.
It is not for lack of bread, but for lack of love that they are abandoned and exposed to
danger and death.

Father, forgive us!

We beg you that we become capable of sincerely loving the poor who do not even have the
strength to beg for food, in order that we may be merciful, just like you, Lord, rich in mercy.
Enable us to love those who are abandoned and crucified, the countless *Christs* of this
world, so that we learn to love not with words, but with deeds and in truth.

Father, convert us!

We stretch out our hands to You and towards our poor brothers and sisters.
As we share our bread with the hungry, bring relief to the afflicted and the sick, welcome
the homeless into our homes, clothe the naked, try to be close to the poor, we touch and heal
their wounds, the very wounded flesh of Jesus the Redeemer.
Only in this way will our wounds, those of families and of society be healed.

Father, listen to us!

We are suffering great trials and pains from the pandemic.
Repenting of our past lives, recognizing that we are one humanity, that we cannot save
ourselves, that no one saves himself, but that it is only by loving You and the poor is it
possible to build your kingdom on this earth.

Father, save us!

We wish to live in the love of your son Jesus who shed every last drop of his precious blood
on the cross to tear us away from suffering and eternal death, to transform this world of ours

into a welcoming home where no one is abandoned, a world in which all may love you and their neighbor as themselves.

Father, love us! Amen.

Litany of Mary Mother of the Poor (from the Church of France)

| | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Lord, have mercy | Lord, have mercy |
| Christ, have mercy | Christ, have mercy |
| Lord, have mercy | Lord, have mercy |
| Christ, hear us | Christ, hear us |
| Christ, hear us | Christ, hear us |
| God the Father our creator | have mercy on us |
| God the Son, our redeemer | have mercy on us |
| God the Holy Spirit, our sanctifier | have mercy on us |
| Holy Trinity, one God | have mercy on us |
| Holy Mary | guide our path |
| Holy Mother of God | light our way |
| Holy Virgin of virgins | give us your Son |
| Daughter of the people of God | guide our path |
| Virgin of Nazareth | light our way |
| Chosen from among women | give us your Son |
| Virgin simple in heart | guide our path |
| Wife of Joseph the worker | light our way |
| Queen of the family | give us your Son |
| Woman of our people | guide our path |
| Hope of the oppressed | light our way |
| Trusted by the poorest | give us your Son |

| | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------|
| Virgin, Mother of Christ | guide our path |
| Virgin, Mother of the Church | light our way |
| Virgin, Mother of men | give us your Son |
| Mother who knows us | guide our path |
| Mother who listens to us | light our way |
| Mother who understands us, | give us your Son |
| Virgin daughter of man | guide our path |
| Daughter of a pilgrim people | lights our way |
| Living presence in history | give us your Son |
| Mother who knows pain | guide our path |
| Mother at the foot of the cross | light our way |
| Mother for those who suffer | give us your Son |
| Lady of joy | guide our path |
| Luminous Virgin | illuminate our way |
| Queen of Peace | give us your Son |

| | |
|--|--------------------|
| Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, | forgive us, O Lord |
| Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, | hear us, O Lord |
| Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, | have mercy on us. |

Pray for us, O holy mother of God that we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

Let us pray

Heavenly Father, grant us to praise with Mary your infinite goodness, and to always enjoy her protection, since in her you have given us a queen who is forgiving towards sinners and merciful towards the poor. Through Christ our Lord.

Amen

**Prayer from the Message of Pope Francis
for the Fourth World Day of the Poor**

O God the Father, creator and lover of creation, just and provident towards all Your children, in this dramatic moment we are experiencing because of Covid-19, we trustingly surrender ourselves into Your blessing arms, accepting Your invitation to stretch out our hand to the poor, who bear Your image.

We thank you for the outstretched hands of health workers, administrators, priests, volunteers, and all those who work to offer essential services to those who lack what is necessary.

Convert those who continue to keep their hands in their pockets and do not allow themselves to be moved by poverty, of which they are often also accomplices. Turn their hands into instruments of justice and peace for the whole world.

O Lord Jesus, you have revealed that you are present in Your weaker brothers and sisters, remind us that the poor are with us to help us welcome Your company into our daily existence.

O Holy Spirit, shake off our indifference, never let us be complacent and continue to stimulate us to do good. Make us recognize and love Jesus in the face of the poor.

O Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, keep the poor, Your beloved children in Your Heart, and transform our outstretched hand into an embrace of sharing and of rediscovered fraternity.

Amen.

Stretch forth your hand to the poor.
The outstretched hand: expression of the Trinitarian gift.

Extending one's hand is one of the simplest gestures that each of us makes every day and often in a mechanical way. However, reflecting on it, we discover that it takes us into the most unexpected depths, expressing nothing less than the meaning of life, because it is a sign of authentic love. The child who comes into the world is born with closed fists and throughout his life his parents will have the noble task of teaching him to open those fists, to be ready to receive and to give. Early on, the newborn perceives that the first effect of reaching out to another allows him to receive the love of his parents. Easily, a list of material goods that are available to him during his process of being received comes to mind, but in addition to the material goods, it goes without saying that learning to be received is lived in the affective relationships that remain the keystone for the peaceful development of his identity. Without knowing it, his parents are preparing him to do this fundamental learning of what to receive.

Learning to receive is essential, but the child should not stop there. At best, his parents will help him perceive this in order to be able to open his hands in view of the gift. It is only after having lived a multitude of positive receiving experiences in a meaningful way that the human person can, in turn, give the love that has been received. There is no complete love without the interchange and balance between these two movements: "receiving and giving". It would be harmful for a person to choose to live his entire life, only in receiving or, on the contrary, in only giving. Love would inevitably be hurt due to the lack of this interchange, which is by no means optional. Yet there are many people who feel more comfortable with one of these two ways. There are some who always expect to receive attention, to be received, to be looked after and sometimes even to be taken care of. Hence, we can see that the transition from receiving to giving did not happen. On the other hand, sometimes we meet people who have only developed the dimension of offering themselves as a gift. They are always ready to help, to be of service to the point of neglecting themselves. They do not like to receive gifts, they do not want to disturb others and find it normal to be constantly of service. However, this interchange is very important. Yet reaching it is not one-sided, rather it has a two-pronged meaning that cannot be divided. Thus, we cannot claim to have a monopoly on giving; we are asked to discover the beauty of allowing the other to offer, which allows him to love us.

Therefore, these two ways (receiving *and* giving) are not addressed to any particular group or social class, but to all people, poor and rich alike. The way of *giving* is not just for the rich. A poor person can give and even must give. *Giving* must be proportionate to our capacities, both material and human. A poor person must continue to hold out a hand to receive but, at the same time he must give. Give of your time, listen, a simple smile. We should never stop giving even under circumstances of poverty. Perfect love is that outstretched hand that receives and gives.

But where does this idea of "receiving and giving" come from? Its roots are directly in the heart of the Trinity. By discovering the relationship of the Trinitarian persons, we

come to understand that the expression of the Father's love for the Son is experienced in the fact that the Father gives himself entirely to his Son and the Son receives him. Then comes the second movement in which the Son in turn, out of pure love, gives himself completely to the Father who receives him. So there is one that empties himself completely and one that receives completely. The gift of one's wealth causes a stripping of the donor, while receiving brings wealth to the receiver. Perfect love expresses itself over and over again in a movement of *perichoresis*, in a perpetual circular movement. Obviously, this circular motion is God's way of loving. Each person has this ability to love but only in relation to another. Reaching out is nothing more than a relational gesture.

During these months of pandemic we have had to fight the widespread idea that considers isolation as an extraordinary grace, maintaining that the fundamental ethical relationship was the relationship of oneself with oneself. This idea is wrong, because the fundamental ethical relationship is the relationship between oneself and others. No love is true or complete without relationship. We take every opportunity in our daily life to achieve the ability to relate in love and self-giving, improving our way of receiving, but also that of giving. May the Lord teach us the balance between giving and receiving in the gesture of outstretched hands, in order to make Trinitarian love present among us.

On this Fourth World Day of the Poor, dioceses, parishes, large and small Christian communities are encouraged to carry out some actions of giving and receiving. The following suggestions can be adapted according to the needs of each community. Let us allow the Holy Spirit to work in us so that we do not impede the love that comes to us from others and the love that we can offer.

Pastoral suggestions

- Organize a pilgrimage for the poor, to allow them to have an opportunity to leave their environment and be able to create new friendships, visit new places and above all live an experience of faith.
- Propose a spiritual retreat or a moment of prayer for poor people.
- Reflect together on expressions of popular piety so they may be experienced authentically, without neglecting an appropriate catechesis that allows their richness and depth to be grasped.
- Offer a poor person a small religious object to carry with him in his everyday life.
- Introduce the poor to figures of local saints or blessed to whom they can entrust their intentions.
- Take advantage of this World Day of the Poor to visit people who are alone in hospitals and centers for the elderly, sometimes even in their homes.

- Pay particular attention to young people who are alone, abandoned, rejected. Invite them to an activity that can help them reintegrate into a new group.
- Give help and hospitality to single mothers.
- Organize support circles to discuss personal poverty and to find new ways to welcome the richness that God wants to offer us.
- Organize meetings for reflection for professionals and business leaders on the subject of poverty.

Catechesis and poverty **Ideas from the new *Directory for Catechesis***

On June 25, 2020, the new *Directory for Catechesis* was presented to the Churches around the world, a document prepared by the *Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization* and approved by Pope Francis on March 23. The aim of the *Directory*, the third after those of 1971 and 1997, is to support and relaunch the commitment of the whole Church - and in particular the service of every catechist - to proclaim the Gospel in the world. The goal of the new document is to make ecclesial catechesis ever more missionary, highlighting those characteristics that place it at the service of the *new evangelization*.

In an attempt to present the entirety of Christian life, to which catechesis is directed, in an organic way, the *Directory* could not fail to touch on the question of the poor and poverty and does so mainly in two different parts of the document. In Chapter VIII “Catechesis in people's lives”, it speaks of “Catechesis with migrants” (nos. 273-276) and of “Catechesis with marginal people” (nos. 279-282); then the paragraph “Catechesis and option for the poor” (nos. 385-388) is found in Chapter X, which deals with catechesis in the face of the different socio-cultural scenarios of today. In short, it can be said that the *Directory* suggests three aspects regarding the link between catechesis and poverty.

1. Catechesis in relation to poverty

The first consideration - which we find in nos. 385-386 and 388 - is of a fundamental nature: catechesis, which has the task of helping the seed of the Gospel mature by accompanying the personal processes of maturing in faith, must consider that for the Church the option for the poor is a true theological category, which belongs to its enduring Tradition and which will be suitably presented and enhanced in all the ordinary ways of catechesis. With this in mind, it would very good if during the course of Christian initiation for children or for adults or for courses of Christian formation in groups and associations, that the proclamation is made of what is briefly described in No. 386: “In the only begotten Son, God himself became poor to enrich humanity (cf. *Phil 2: 6-8*). In proclaiming the kingdom of God, Jesus has the poor as

his privileged recipients (cf *Lk* 4: 18-19; *Mt* 11: 5). He declares that the poor are blessed (cf *Lk* 6: 20-21), thus teaching that serving and receiving every person in a situation of poverty means recognizing Jesus himself present, so much so that we can identify him with them: You did it to me (*Mt* 25:40)". It is a real kerygmatic proclamation of the heart of the Gospel that tells with a few brushstrokes the divine condescension towards humanity and inextricably binds Christian discipleship to the choice of developing attitudes of poverty and simplicity, of sharing and generosity. The *Directory* further says: "For the disciples of Christ, poverty is above all a vocation to follow the poor Jesus, it is an attitude of the heart that prevents us from thinking about contingent realities as an objective of life and a condition for happiness". By calling into question the capacity of catechesis to "evangelize by educating" in every situation in which it carries out its proclamation. The Christian community is urged to form its children in the Christian life in its completeness, which becomes fully visible when the encounter with Christ becomes service to the poorest.

2. To be evangelized by the poor

Continuing this reflection, it is easy to come to an awareness that helps the Church to live "a missionary dynamism that implies mutual enrichment", as in No. 387. Taking advantage of a provocation by Pope Francis in EG, the *Directory* invites Christians to listen to the announcement that comes from the very presence of the poor and to "recognize the saving power of their lives". It is a strong affirmation that allows us to receive from God, thanks to the mediation of his most fragile and needy children, an authentic Easter proclamation on the value of suffering lived with Christ. Indeed, the poor, who "with their own sufferings know the suffering Christ" (EG 198), have an immediate and lived experience of faith that resonates for the whole community as a true catechesis.

3. To evangelize the poor

The third consideration that we draw from the *Directory for Catechesis* concerns the task that the Church has towards the poorest brothers and sisters and that consists in considering that the summit of care for them is attention to their faith. In fact, it is not unusual to note that, generally, ecclesial attention to the most needy only concerns the most immediate aspects of life, such as food, accommodation and health. Without in any way diminishing the value of these actions, Pope Francis does not fail to recall the value of "a privileged and preferential religious care" (EG 200), which is the greatest charity. The *Directory*, in numbers 279-280, recognizes that the catechetical commitment for the poorest, aimed at making the Lord Jesus explicitly known and illuminating even those lives most marked by fatigue with faith and hope, is almost always of an informal and fortuitous nature. It is a pastoral care of the first proclamation, simple and spontaneous, which passes through the warmth of a human relationship, but which equally requires commitment together with a certain dose of "competence". This is a very fruitful space for growth for the workers of charity in our ecclesial communities, called in a certain sense to feel themselves catechists of the poorest. Finally, the *Directory* offers some specific indications for catechetical service in relation to migrants (Nos. 273-276) and prisoners (Nos. 281-282), useful for those who work in these particular fields.

Ideas for evaluating catechesis in relation to the poor and poverty

- How present is the proclamation of the beatitude of poverty according to the teaching of the Lord and the constant teaching of the Church in the ordinary catechetical program of children, young people and adults? To what extent do the faith enrichment programs in groups and associations educate to a poor and simple lifestyle or help to question oneself about the correct use of material goods?

- In the life of the ecclesial community, is one open to accept that the poor themselves bring the message with their lives? Are we aware that every Christian can receive the proclamation of the Gospel from them too?

- Is the charitable service to the most needy lived as a “work of evangelization”? Are the workers of charity capable of sensing and awakening a “thirst for Christ” deep in the hearts of those they serve? Can the formation of volunteers also be expected to pay attention to the themes of the first proclamation of the faith?

(IV back cover)

THE LOGO OF THE WORLD DAY OF THE POOR

The aspect of reciprocity is reflected in the logo of the World Day of the Poor. You can see an open door and two people meeting on the threshold. Both *stretch out* their hand; one because he is asking for help, the other because he wants to offer it. Indeed, it is difficult to understand which of the two is the real poor person. Or better, both are poor. Whoever stretches out his hand asks for sharing; whoever reaches out to help is invited to share. There are two outstretched hands that meet where each offers something. Two arms that express solidarity and that invite one another not to remain on the threshold, but to go towards each other. The poor can enter the house, once it is understood that the help from the house is a sharing. In this context, the words that Pope Francis writes in his Message become more than ever significant: "Stretch forth your hand to the poor" (cf. *Sir* 7:32). Ancient wisdom placed these words as a sacred code to be followed in life. They resonate today with all their wealth of meaning to help us also focus our gaze on the essential and overcome the barriers of indifference. Poverty always takes on different faces, which call for attention to every particular circumstance: in each of these we can meet the Lord Jesus, who revealed that he is present in the least of his brothers (cf. *Mt* 25:40) ".

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Ideas from the new *Directory for Catechesis*

The Logo of The World Day of The Poor

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