

+ J. M. J.

It's now been one week since our shelter week ended at Our Lady of Sorrows. I thank everyone who participated in anyway. It is good to let our images and experiences from this week continue to permeate our prayer and allow the Holy Spirit to work in our hearts.

In the reading we hear Luke's version of the beatitudes. They are less in number, and they are strikingly different than from what we hear in the Gospel according to Matthew. We are used to hearing **"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."** Today we hear **"Blessed are you who are poor, for the kingdom of God is yours."** We are familiar with **"Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied."** Today we heard **"Blessed are you who are now hungry, for you will be satisfied."** To hammer the point home Jesus adds **"woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation"** and **"Woe to you who are filled now, for you will be hungry."**

The Church teaches us to have a preferential love for the poor. That is because Jesus had a special love for the poor, so much so that he chose to be poor himself. St. Paul tells us that Jesus "emptied himself" of his divinity when he came into the world. He did not come in great power or circumstance, but when he was born "there was no room for [him] in the inn," his parents can only offer the poor offering of two turtledoves or two young pigeons (cf. Lev. 12:8).

If Jesus teaches this preferential love for the poor and calls them blessed we as a Church have to be ever cognizant of the poor among us. Let's be honest. The poor are easy to forget. It is easy to let those images of Haiti slip from our minds as we go through our daily routines. We struggle those times when we visit the city of Detroit and encounter someone begging, but then when we come home we can put those images out of our minds. We may ask ourselves when was the last time we volunteered be it at shelter week or at a soup kitchen.

The poor are blessed precisely because they cannot rely on their own means. They are forced to rely on the generosity of others. When we acquire things we can forget to look at our comfort as gifts from God.

We can forget to rely on God completely. We can be tempted to move away from prayer, especially in our busyness. Most of us will be faced with a time in our life when we have to rely on others to help us, and this can be very hard for us who have been trained as Americans to make ourselves and to be strong. Whether it be because of lack of work, illness, or the trials of old age, God reminds us that we were created with a need inside of ourselves that can only be filled by God. Sometimes we have to return to that truth.

We are right upon the season of Lent. The Church in her wisdom gives us the threefold practice of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. It is fasting and almsgiving that we voluntarily make ourselves poor in some way so that we will be thankful to God for our blessings, so that we may remember those who have so much less than ourselves, and so that while we are depriving ourselves of something we realize that we depend on God and nothing else for our happiness.

This week then let's consider carefully what it is we will do this Lent. Specifically, how will we pray more, how will we fast, and how will we be charitable through our gifts to others which could be monetary or through the gift of our time? Jeremiah tells us **"Blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD, whose hope is in the LORD."** May our Lenten penances help us to refocus our trust and hope in the Lord alone.