



PREFERENTIAL OPTION FOR THE POOR

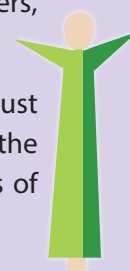


“ When the Church talks of the preferential option for the poor, it means that we need always to keep in mind how any decision we make might impact the poor.”

Pope Francis, *On Fraternity and Social Friendship*

The Church holds that we should all have a special focus on supporting, walking alongside, and sharing with people who are living in poverty. Pope Francis's much quoted phrase about wanting “a poor church for the poor” holds the Catholic social teaching principle of the preferential option for the poor at its heart. Although it includes the charitable support of the Church, both the institution and individual members, for those living in poverty locally and globally, it is also wider than this.

The option for the poor includes talking with, and listening to, those who are living in poverty. It is not just thinking that we know what people want or need, but listening to people, sharing in their suffering, being the “voice for the voiceless” when it is not being heard, whilst enabling the voice, the experience, the needs of people to be heard by others in our communities, society, and the world.



“ This is why I want a Church which is poor and for the poor. They have much to teach us. Not only do they share in the *sensus fidei*, but in their difficulties they know the suffering Christ. We need to let ourselves be evangelized by them... We are called to find Christ in them, to lend our voice to their causes, but also to be their friends, to listen to them, to speak for them and to embrace the mysterious wisdom which God wishes to share with us through them.”

Pope Francis, *Joy of the Gospel*, 198

Caritas, love in action, is charity and justice together. With the preferential option for the poor, it is more than charity alone. It is seeking justice at all levels of society. It involves tackling those structures which keep people living in poverty, what St John Paul II termed “structures of sin”. It is about enabling people to be part of the decision making processes which affect their lives. It is enabling all people to play a full and active part in society – something which we are all called to do, as expressed in the guiding principle of participation and community.

Pope Francis has spoken about “the globalisation of indifference”, and how it is a grave illness of the world at this time. Despite modern communication technology, we become blind to the reality of the world, hiding from the truth of poverty people suffer all around us. We are called to open our eyes, see what is happening, and take action.

In St Paul's letter to the community in Galatia (Galatians 2), the mark of how just a people are is dependent upon how they treat people living in poverty, the outcasts, those seemingly “least” in society.”

Writing in the first century, the challenge from St John remains one for us today:

“If anyone is well off in worldly possessions and sees his brother in need but closes his heart to him, how can the love of God be remaining in him? Children, our love must be not just words or mere talk, but something active and genuine.” 1 John 3.17-18

We must put our love into action: Caritas. These words are echoed by Pope Francis when speaking in Assisi:

“ We are all called to be poor, to strip us of ourselves; and to do this we must learn how to be with the poor, to share with those who lack basic necessities, to touch the flesh of Christ! The Christian is not one who speaks about the poor, no! He is one who encounters them, who looks them in the eye, who touches them.”

Pope Francis, Assisi, 2017

Symbols to add to the focal point

A loaf of bread; some newspapers or print outs of news stories about poverty

“ They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus, son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. When he heard it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, ‘Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!’ Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, ‘Son of David, have mercy on me!’ Jesus stood still and said, ‘Call him here.’ And they called the blind man, saying to him, ‘Take heart; get up, he is calling you.’ So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. Then Jesus said to him, ‘What do you want me to do for you?’ The blind man said to him, ‘My teacher, let me see again.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Go; your faith has made you well.’ Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way. ”

Mark 10:46-52



Luke 6:20-22

SCRIPTURE

‘Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the kingdom of God.
‘Blessed are you who are hungry now,
for you will be filled.
‘Blessed are you who weep now,
for you will laugh.’



HOMILY NOTES

- Pope Francis has always spoken about wanting “a poor Church for the poor”. It is blatantly obvious that Pope Francis has a heart for people living in poverty, and he is continually challenging all of us, Catholics and non-Catholics alike, to open our eyes to the suffering of our sisters and brothers – remember that principle of human dignity – and to take positive action to support them.
- Powerful words from the first letter of St John state: “If anyone is well off in worldly possessions and sees his brother in need but closes his heart to him, how can the love of God be remaining in him? Children, our love must be not just words or mere talk, but something active and genuine.” 1 John 3.17-18
- Love in action, active and genuine, is what Caritas is about. It is a theme Pope Francis frequently echoes. When in Assisi, he said: “The Christian is not one who speaks about the poor, no! He is one who encounters them, who looks them in the eye, who touches them.”
- It goes further than charity alone. Remember the story of Jesus who heals Bartimaeus, someone who was begging and is blind. The way Jesus relates to him can teach us a lot about this person who was suffering, an outcast, and given he was begging we can assume living in poverty.
- Jesus calls him to himself – he includes someone who has been ostracised by society
- Jesus talks with Bartimaeus, asking about him, asking what he wants. He doesn’t assume he knows; he doesn’t just give him money; he doesn’t quickly heal him and move on. He listens, respecting the dignity of Bartimaeus.
- Jesus then heals Bartimaeus, helping him as he could.
- We then hear that Bartimaeus joins the group walking along – he has been reintegrated to society and made welcome.
- How do we truly listen to those who are living in poverty? How do we learn from them, as it’s a two way process? Pope Francis says: “We need to let ourselves be evangelised by them... We are called to find Christ in them, to lend our voice to their causes, but also to be their friends, to listen to them, to speak for them and to embrace the mysterious wisdom which God wishes to share with us through them.”

PRAYER



- For our Church; that we will discern what it is to be a poor Church for the poor.
- For all leaders in society; that they will open their eyes to the needs of people living in poverty, and do all they can to alleviate their suffering.
- For those living in poverty in our community, and in our world; that they will feel the love of God despite the sufferings they endure.
- For our local community; that we will have the courage to place people living in poverty at the heart of all we do as a parish.
- And who are those within our own community living in poverty or destitution? What are we called to do?

Pope Francis, *The Joy of the Gospel*, 198



HYMNS

- Tell out my soul – Timothy Dudley-Smith
- Bread for the world – Bernadette Farrell
- Jubilee song – Bernadette Farrell
- O let all who thirst – John Foley
- The cry of the poor – Jong Foley