

HOMILY – 33RD SUNDAY OF THE YEAR – 19 NOVEMBER 2017

I remember, many years ago, an elderly and sick Missionary priest, asked me, as a trusted friend, to be his executor on his will. Because he had lived the life of relative poverty, there wasn't, in Western terms, an enormous sum of money to dispense but what there was, he wanted to be given to the poor. At first, I thought, that is easy but then asking the question, who are the poor? Is it not the starving in Yemen and Sudan. Is it not the untouchables, living on the streets in Bangladesh. Is it not homeless refugees in Syria and Iraq and so on. If it is, how do I make sure they get the funds without a percentage being creamed off by 'Middle Management'? Then, I realized, that we have, in the Catholic Church, many dedicated religious men and women, working with the poorest in the world, including the Mother Theresa Nuns, The Kiltegan Fathers and Aid to the Church in Need. We have, of course, the Sisters of Mercy, serving 1,000 meals a week in Edinburgh, to the homeless as well as the huge amount of work done by the SVDP. I hope and pray I fulfilled his wishes.

Pope Francis sees the World Day of the Poor as a time for 'deeds' and 'works' not just 'words'. The deeds he urges are encounter sharing with the poor. Over and over he asks, like Jesus did, for 'outstretched hands' that touch and share with, in true and tangible solidarity, our sisters and brothers in need.

What do we need in this life? Perhaps to know we are loved and cared for by God and our neighbour. Jesus shows us that we are loved by God, especially when we care for our neighbour and put their needs first before our own.

Recently I went out and bought a new chair, from the Broxburn Bargain Centre, then afterwards, I asked the question "Do I really need this chair? Is it perhaps money that could have been given to the poor? Sometimes we can confuse needs with wants. We maybe want something but kid ourselves on that we need it. Consumerism and advertising try to convince us that we need to spend money on many things, some of which, may not be necessary. In truth, many of us, including myself, could learn to live more simply. What about you?

One of the primary purposes of the Catholic Church is the care and welfare of the poor. Remember, when Jesus unrolled the text, from the Prophet Isaiah, in the Synagogue, in Capernaum, it said, 'The Spirit of the Lord has been given to me, he has sent me to give the Good News to the Poor'.

In the Catechism, the Church teaches, 'God bless those who come to the aid of the poor and rebukes those who turn away from them'. It is by what they have done for the poor that Jesus Christ will recognise his chosen ones. Poverty as we know takes many forms, as does the sin of greed. We all have to be governors of our own conscience. Asking ourselves, like the rich young man who approached Jesus on how to inherit eternal life, asking the question, do material things have a hold on me? If Jesus challenged me to sell all I have and follow him, could I do it? In other words, am I imprisoned by what I possess?

What in essence we need to do is realise our lasting treasure lies in believing in the Kingdom of God, to have a strong faith, a moral conscience and generous spirit. Therefore, to have a contempt for greed and selfishness.

The so called 'poverty' of the rich is often loneliness, paranoia, fear and suspicion of others. Jesus reminds us again and again, that excessive wealth becomes a burden, not a joy. Learning the distinction comes from a strong and vibrant spiritual life.

That is what the parable in the Gospel is teaching us today. Let the 'Talent' of your spiritual life grow and multiply. Don't hid or bury the needs of the soul. To deny your life as a soul, is akin to denying there is a God. The greatest treasure is your faith.

So, on this World Day of the Poor, as decreed by Pope Francis, who leads by example, let us firstly give thanks for the generosity of spirit in this parish community, the Scots are universally a generous people. And secondly, as taught by the Pope, let us react against a culture of discard and waste and embrace the culture of encountering the poorest people in our community.

Thank you.