

Homily
Monday 6th November 2017
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(Rm 11:29-36; Ps 69; Lk 14:12-14)

“When you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. ... You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just” .

Brothers and sister, may the Lord give you peace.

THE POOR HOLD THE KEY TO JOY

*As pearls in oysters ,
As gold in sand ,
As diamonds in rocks,
So is joy in the poor.*

Since we are celebrating this chapter under the theme: *“As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.”* (Jn 17:18). I will articulate my reflections this morning around three points: Inviting Jesus, Jesus disturbs, going for the pearl!

1. Inviting Jesus

Today’s Gospel passage presents Jesus in the company of an important personality, a Pharisee who had invited him. Many Gospel narrations talk about Jesus being invited for one reason or another: Starting with the invitation to the wedding feast at Cana, to the invitation to attend to sick like Lazarus. I do not remember reading somewhere that Jesus turned down an invitation. Even when he delayed to go, like in the case of Lazarus, he ended up going. And everywhere he went, Jesus brought joy to many, especially the poor and the downtrodden. His mere presence in the house of Zacchaeus was such a transforming experience that, without any request from Jesus, Zachaeus promised to give half his property to the poor and make up four-fold for anyone he had cheated. *“The joy of the gospel, writes Pope Francis, fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. With Christ joy is constantly born anew.”* (Evangelii Gaudium, 1). *“Behold, I stand at the door and knock; says the Lord, if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me”* Rev 3:20).

2. Jesus disturbs

In today’s Gospel, we hear Jesus say to his host: *“When you give a feast, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your kinsmen or rich neighbours, ... invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. ... You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just”*. These are words that disturb. As to whether his host followed these instructions or not, the Gospels are silent. But what type of people are most disturbed by such words? They are those who hear the first part of the request, and not the second, the promise; Or those who hear the request and do not believe in the promise. The Gospels tell us of the

rich young man to whom Jesus looked with love and said: *"If you want to be perfect, go, sell you have and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come and follow me!"*. He went away sad because he had great wealth, (cf. Mt 19:21-22) He neither saw the loves in Jesus' eyes nor believed in the promise.

3. *Going for the pearl*

The exhortation of the Lord Jesus is actually like a pearl in an oyster. Only those who believe that pearls can be found in oysters will go for them. The indication here is not so much a call to do some charitable work. It is much more an exhortation to give the poor a special place in his life. The first part constitutes the shell. It is rough and of little or no value and yet that is what many persons hear: *"When you give a feast, do not invite your friends... invite the poor."* It shocks. Yet, the pearl is the second part: *"you will be blessed. ... you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just"*. It is written: *"Blessed is he who considers the poor! The LORD delivers him in the day of trouble"* (Ps 41:1).

St. Francis had a personal experience of this as he writes in his testament: *"when I was in sin, even the sight of lepers was like acid to me. But the Lord himself led me among them, and I worked mercy with them, and helped them. when I left, all that had been so acidic to me was turned into sweetness in my soul and my body."* (Test. 1-3). *"He was not satisfied to embrace lepers and give them alms, but chose to go to Gubbio to stay with them"*, emphasizes the Pope. St. Elizabeth of Hungary and St. Louis of France, both patron saints of the OFS, were remarkable in their care for the poor. Pope Francis continually calls for a special care to the poor, those at the peripheries. Recently during his visit in Bologna, the Pope organized a party for the poor right in the Church.

Pope Francis has also instituted the world day of the poor, and indeed, on November 29th, we will be celebrating the first ever world day of the poor. In his message for this occasion, the Holy Father writes: *"Whenever we set out to love as Jesus loved, we have to take the Lord as our example; especially when it comes to loving the poor"*¹ The Holy Father adds: *"we may think of the poor simply as the beneficiaries of some occasional volunteer work, or of impromptu acts of generosity that appease our conscience. However good and useful such acts may be for making us sensitive to people's needs and injustices that are often their cause, they ought to lead to a true encounter with the poor and a sharing that becomes a way of life."*² If a formative journey would be transformative, it must include an experience of intimacy with the poor. It is a matter of God's infinite wisdom as st. Paul clearly puts it in today's 1st Reading. *"O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways"*.

I now invite all of us to conclude our reflection this morning with this simple song: "

*You are an Awesome God
Mighty God, I praise your name, Awesome God!*

May Jesus whom we invite into our lives this morning bring us greater joy, disturb us with his love help us to believe in the pearl of joy hidden in the poor.

¹ Message of His Holiness Pope Francis , First World Day of the Poor, 1.

² Idem, n°3.