

Pastoral Aid for the Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

(Poverty Awareness Month - January)

January 28, 2018

usccb.org/about/catholic-campaign-for-human-development/poverty-education/poverty-awareness-month.cfm

Reflection on the Sunday Readings

Introduction:

- Listening is an important ingredient to every healthy relationship. Can you think of an instance in which a relationship in your life either deepened or was challenged due to the ability or inability of one or both parties to listen to the other?
- Our relationship with Christ, and with our neighbors, in whom Christ is present, is the same way. Today's readings remind us of the important of listening. Listening to God's call for our lives, our communities, and world is essential. We first listen, and then we are called to respond.

First Reading (Deuteronomy 18:15-20):

- Throughout the Old Testament, God speaks through prophets like Moses, often calling the people to repent of their unfaithfulness—which is often illustrated by their worship of false idols, immoral living, and failure to care for those who are poor and oppressed.
- In today's first reading, Moses describes the role of a prophet, who is to be God's "voice" to the people. Moses invites the people to *listen* to God's words to them.
- Moses' message from God to the people spans numerous chapters in Deuteronomy. The instructions aim to help the people remain in right relationship with *both* God and neighbor. Part of the instructions are about caring for the stranger, orphan and widow (14:29) and forgiving the debts of those who are poor (15:1-11), for example.
- Moses exhorts the people to *listen* (18:15). Those who *listen* to God's voice, engaging in both right worship (orthodoxy) and right practice or deed (orthopraxy), will flourish.

Psalm (95:1-2, 6-7, 7-9)

- The refrain of today's Psalm likewise exhorts the people to hear God's voice: "If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts."

Second Reading (1 Corinthians 7:32-35)

- Listening is also key in today's second reading. Paul writes to the community at Corinth in anticipation of Christ's second coming, which he and the early Christians believed was imminent.
- Whatever our state in life, this reading calls each of us to create space in our hearts and lives so that, "without distraction," we can *listen* to God's voice.

Gospel (Mark 1:21-28)

- In today's Gospel, Jesus—the son of God, the one about whom the prophets spoke—speaks words that elicit immediate response.
- "He commands even the unclean spirits and they obey him," the people remark. If "even the unclean spirits" obey, then those who are "faithful" should be even better at recognizing Christ's voice!
- We can peel back another layer to this story by asking: Who is the man with the unclean spirit, whom Jesus liberates? In Jesus' time, mental illness, disability, and disease were frequently attributed to demonic possession. (See, for example, Mt. 9:32-34, 12:22-32, and 17:14-21; and Lk. 4:31-41.) As a result, those who were sick, disabled, or mentally ill were on the peripheries. They were ignored or even intentionally marginalized. But not by Jesus. Jesus approaches the man in today's Gospel without fear. He sees the person behind the condition. In some other healing stories (e.g. Mt. 9:32-38, Mk. 1:29-45, etc.), Jesus is "moved by pity" or compassion. He speaks with authority, healing the one who is sick or possessed. Those who watch the miracles rarely seem to understand Jesus' message. We know his invitation to faith and compassion is not only for the Gospel crowds and Pharisees: it is for us today as well!

Application:

- We all struggle to *listen* to Christ's call. This can be challenging due to our busyness or from our unwillingness to prioritize prayer or to encounter Christ in the "other."
- How can we listen, when the world around us seems so much in turmoil? Instead of viewing prayer as a way to escape from the realities around us, can we think of it as a special time to unite the deepest concerns of our hearts, and of the world, with Christ's loving presence?
- Try this prayer exercise: later today, find a quiet space and read the Gospel reading again (Mark 1:21-28). Imagine that you are a character in the story—perhaps someone in the crowd, perhaps the man with the unclean spirit. Imagine how it would feel to be there. Imagine using your senses: what do you see around you? What do you hear? What do you smell? Imagine seeing or meeting Jesus. React to what he says and does. Enter into the story.
- Then, read the story again. This time, substitute a modern-day person into the story for the person with the unclean spirit—perhaps someone who is often rejected: a homeless person; someone with a mental illness; an undocumented person; an individual with a disability; a refugee. Watch Jesus see and approach this person. See what happens. Let this exercise lead you into prayer for those on the peripheries. Pray about how Christ might be calling you to respond.
- *[Note to homilist: visit the U.S. Catholic bishops' Nine Ways to Pray resource at bit.ly/9WaysPray for additional ideas that connect love of God and love of neighbor. If appropriate, mention additional ideas.]*

- In *God is Love*, Pope Benedict XVI challenged us to allow love of God and love of neighbor to “become one: in the least of our brethren we find Jesus himself, and in Jesus we find God” (no. 15).
- The month of January is [Poverty Awareness Month](#). Connecting love of God and love of neighbor in prayer can help us form a strong foundation through which we can open our hearts to see Christ’s face in those who experience poverty—over 40 million people in the United States. At [PovertyUSA.org](#), a website of the Catholic bishops in the United States, you can learn facts about poverty, watch videos, and read stories about how faith communities are responding.
- Another part of our response is to allow ourselves to be “moved with compassion” to imitate Jesus’ example of healing.
 - Consider: how can I imitate Jesus and encounter someone on the peripheries?
 - In our parish... *[Note to homilist: Insert here examples of ways that people can get involved in efforts at your parish to address poverty. If possible, name a specific, concrete upcoming opportunity to join with others to encounter people in poverty and to address its causes. You can also visit the Poverty Map (County Level view) at www.povertyusa.org/the-state-of-poverty/poverty-map-county/ to find out whether any local anti-poverty efforts sponsored by the U.S. bishops through the Catholic Campaign for Human Development are happening in your community.]*
- Following the footsteps of Jesus, we are all called to listen to God’s voice, recognize his presence in our neighbors, and respond with acts of charity and justice.

Quotes

“The times talk to us of so much poverty in the world and this is a scandal. Poverty in the world is a scandal. In a world where there is so much wealth, so many resources to feed everyone, it is unfathomable that there are so many hungry children, that there are so many children without an education, so many poor persons. Poverty today is a cry.” (Pope Francis, [Meeting with Students of Jesuit Schools—Q & A](#), 6/7/13)

“To love God and neighbor is not something abstract, but profoundly concrete: it means seeing in every person the face of the Lord to be served, to serve him concretely. And you are, dear brothers and sisters, the face of Jesus.” (Pope Francis, [Address during Visit at the Homeless Shelter “Dono Di Maria,”](#) 5/21/13)

“A way has to be found to enable everyone to benefit from the fruits of the earth, and not simply to close the gap between the affluent and those who must be satisfied with the crumbs falling from the table, but above all to satisfy the demands of justice, fairness and respect for every human being.” (Pope Francis, [Address to the Food and Agricultural Organization](#), 6/20/13)

“Among our tasks as witnesses to the love of Christ is that of giving a voice to the cry of the poor.” (Pope Francis, [Address to the Archbishop of Canterbury](#), 6/14/13)

"Poverty calls us to sow hope. . . . Poverty is the flesh of the poor Jesus, in that child who is hungry, in the one who is sick, in those unjust social structures." (Pope Francis, [Meeting with Students of Jesuit Schools—Q & A](#), 6/7/13)

"Within the community of believers there can never be room for a poverty that denies anyone what is needed for a dignified life." (Pope Benedict XVI, [God is Love](#), 2005, no. 20)

"We cannot remain passive before certain processes of globalization which not infrequently increase the gap between the rich and the poor worldwide. We must denounce those who squander the earth's riches, provoking inequalities that cry out to heaven (cf. *Jas* 5:4). For example, it is impossible to remain silent before the 'distressing images of huge camps throughout the world of displaced persons and refugees, who are living in makeshift conditions in order to escape a worse fate, yet are still in dire need. Are these human beings not our brothers and sisters? Do their children not come into the world with the same legitimate expectations of happiness as other children?' (246) The Lord Jesus, the bread of eternal life, spurs us to be mindful of the situations of extreme poverty in which a great part of humanity still lives: these are situations for which human beings bear a clear and disquieting responsibility. Indeed, 'on the basis of available statistical data, it can be said that less than half of the huge sums spent worldwide on armaments would be more than sufficient to liberate the immense masses of the poor from destitution. This challenges humanity's conscience. To peoples living below the poverty line, more as a result of situations to do with international political, commercial and cultural relations than as a result of circumstances beyond anyone's control, our common commitment to truth can and must give new hope' (247)" (Pope Benedict XVI, [The Sacrament of Charity](#), no. 90).

"Those who are more influential, because they have a greater share of goods and common services, should feel responsible for the weaker and be ready to share with them all they possess. Those who are weaker, for their part, in the same spirit of solidarity, should not adopt a purely passive attitude or one that is destructive of the social fabric, but, while claiming their legitimate rights, should do what they can for the good of all." (St. John Paul II, [On Social Concerns](#), 1987, no. 39)

"Today more than ever, the Church is aware that her social message will gain credibility more immediately from the *witness of actions* than as a result of its internal logic and consistency. This awareness is also a source of her preferential option for the poor, which is never exclusive or discriminatory towards other groups. This option is not limited to material poverty, since it is well known that there are many other forms of poverty, especially in modern society—not only economic but cultural and spiritual poverty as well. The Church's love for the poor, which is essential for her and a part of her constant tradition, impels her to give attention to a world in which poverty is threatening to assume massive proportions in spite of technological and economic progress. In the countries of the West, different forms of poverty are being

experienced by groups which live on the margins of society, by the elderly and the sick, by the victims of consumerism, and even more immediately by so many refugees and migrants." (St. John Paul II, [The Hundredth Year](#), 1991, no. 57)

"The Church's love for the poor . . . is a part of her constant tradition." This love is inspired by the Gospel of the Beatitudes, of the poverty of Jesus, and of his concern for the poor. . . . "Those who are oppressed by poverty are the object of a preferential love on the part of the Church which, since her origin and in spite of the failings of many of her members, has not ceased to work for their relief, defense, and liberation." ([Catechism of the Catholic Church](#), nos. 2444, 2448, quoting *The Hundredth Year*, no. 57, and *Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation*, no. 68)

Bulletin announcement

Listen to God's call! Try out one of the "Nine Ways to Pray" (bit.ly/9WaysPray) exercises to reflect on the connection between love of God and neighbor. Learn more about how poverty affects families and communities and how the Church is responding at PovertyUSA.org, a website of the U.S. Catholic bishops.

Note: If your bulletin contains a "message from the pastor" column, consider focusing on the call to listen, and invite parishioners to do the prayer exercise described in the "Application" section of the homily help above. Consider localizing the examples of marginalized persons to include those affected by issues in your community.

Parish Activity Suggestions

- **Play the Poverty Tour video.** Play [this video](#) after mass, in the parish hall, at religious education classes, etc. to help parishioners learn about the reality of poverty.
- **Share educational materials from PovertyUSA.org** with catechists, religious educators, youth ministers, and others who can help share information about the reality of poverty and our Catholic response. Some of these educational materials include:
 - [PovertyUSA Poverty Education Center](#)
 - [Learning activities on poverty from WeAreSaltAndLight.org](#)
 - [Creating on the Margins: a youth art contest to help youth learn about poverty and our Catholic response](#)
 - [Poverty Awareness Month calendar and reflections](#)
- **Host a panel discussion about poverty in your community.** Invite guest speakers from local community organizations who can talk about the causes of poverty, and how we can help.
- **Share one or more of the following at the above events, or as bulletin inserts.**
 - [Background on Worsening Economic Inequality](#)
 - [Primer on Poverty, an Option for the Poor, and the Common Good](#)
 - [Background on Just Wage and the Federal Minimum Wage](#)
 - [Selected Quotes of Pope Francis by Subject](#)

Communion Antiphon

The second option for the Communion Antiphon for the Fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time can further assist our reflection on poverty. The Antiphon is from Matthew 5:3-4: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are the meek, for they shall possess the land."

Prayers of the Faithful

Possible Responses:

- Lord, hear our prayer.
- In your mercy, hear us Lord.
- In your compassion, answer us God.

Possible Prayers:

For the grace to see every human being as a child of God, regardless of race, language, ability, or economic situation, let us pray to the Lord.

For the wisdom to receive the stories and experiences of those different from ourselves and to respond with respect, let us pray to the Lord.

For our public officials, that they will strive to work for fair education, adequate housing, and equal opportunities for employment for all, let us pray to the Lord.

For the men and women who are not able to find jobs. We pray for their continued perseverance and determination as they continue to seek ways in which to participate in God's creation and work. We pray to the Lord.

For men, women and children who suffer from our lack of solidarity in their daily struggle to survive. May we be aware of our responsibility to be in relationship with our brothers and sisters in the world. We pray to the Lord.

Mass For the Progress of Peoples

An additional option is celebrating the Mass *For the Progress of Peoples* (Masses and Prayers for Various Needs and Occasions, no. 29) on appropriate days. In January 2018 it may be celebrated on the following days: January 9-13, 15, 16, 18-20, 23, 27, 29, 30. Below are the prayers for this Mass, followed by an excerpt from *Eucharistic Prayer III for Use in Masses for Various Needs* (titled "Jesus, the Way to the Father"), which is recommended for us with the Mass for the Progress of Peoples.

Collect:

O God, who gave on origin to all peoples
and willed to gather from them one family for yourself,
fill all hearts, we pray, with the fire of your love
and kindle in them a desire
for the just advancement of their neighbor,
that, through the good things
which you richly bestow upon all,
each human person may be brought to perfection,
every division may be removed,
and equity and justice may be established in human society.
Through our Lord...

Prayer Over the Offerings:

Hear, O Lord, in your mercy,
the prayers of those who cry to you
and, as you receive your Church's offering,
grant that all may be filled with the spirit of divine sonship,
so that, with inequalities overcome by charity,
one family of peoples may be formed in your peace.
Through Christ our Lord.

Prayer After Communion:

Having been fed with the one Bread
by which you constantly renew the human family,
we pray, O Lord,
that from participation in this Sacrament of unity
we may draw a love strong and pure
to help peoples in their development
and, prompted by charity, to fulfill what justice requires.
Through Christ our Lord

The *Roman Missal* recommends using Form III of the *Eucharistic Prayer for Use in Masses for Various Needs*. It includes the following petition:

Keep us attentive to the needs of all
that, sharing their grief and pain,
their joy and hope,
we may faithfully bring them the good news of salvation
and go forward with them along the way of your Kingdom.