



“I HAVE LOVED YOU”: A REFLECTION ON *DILEXI TE* AND THE CRY FOR RACIAL JUSTICE

by Bishop Joseph Perry, Chairman, Ad Hoc Committee Against Racism



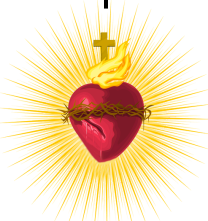
“Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.” — Matthew 25:40

The Lord hears the cry of the poor. This truth, echoed throughout Scripture and reaffirmed in Pope Leo XIV’s exhortation *Dilexi Te*, is a summons to the Church in every age. “The condition of the poor,” the Holy Father writes, “is a cry that, throughout human history, consistently challenges our lives, societies, political and economic systems, and the Church” (*Dilexi Te*, no. 9). In this cry, we hear the voice of Christ Himself.

In our own nation, this cry is intimately bound to the experiences of communities of color. The sin of racism has left many of our Black, Native American, and Hispanic brothers and sisters disproportionately burdened by poverty.

Pope Leo instructs us, “As the Body of Christ, the Church experiences the lives of the poor as her very “flesh,” for theirs is a privileged place within the pilgrim people of God.” The Holy Father speaks of poverty in its many forms: material deprivation, social marginalization, spiritual and cultural impoverishment, and the loss of rights, space, and freedom. Pope Leo tells us love for people experiencing all forms of poverty “is the evangelical hallmark of a Church faithful to the heart of God” (*Dilexi Te*, no. 103). These “new forms of poverty,” he warns, are subtle and dangerous. They are often cloaked in indifference, perpetuated by systems that deny dignity and disempower communities.

We see this play out in our country too many times. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2024), 35.9 million people live in poverty, including 19.3% of Native American/Alaska Natives, 18.4% of Black Americans, and 15% of Hispanics. Furthermore, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2025), unemployment rates for Black Americans were 6.3%, and for Hispanics 4.8% compared to 3.6% for white Americans.



These are not mere statistics—each one represent a sister or brother-- lives marked by struggle, resilience, and hope. As the U.S. bishops affirmed in *Open Wide Our Hearts*, “The poverty experienced by many of these communities has its roots in racist policies that continue to impede the ability of people to find affordable housing, meaningful work, adequate education, and social mobility.”

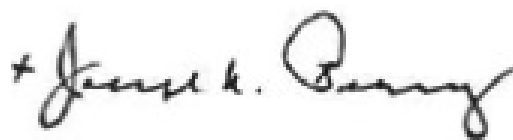
Pope Leo reminds us that “the preferential choice for the poor is a source of extraordinary renewal both for the Church and for society; if we can only set ourselves free of our self-centeredness and open our ears to their cry” (*Dilexi Te*, no. 7). This renewal is already visible in the faith-inspired work of Catholic Charities, Catholic Relief Services, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, and countless parish ministries that serve those on the margins. Yet we must go further.

But we are not without hope. The actions of God in the Old and New Testament tell us he is the ultimate liberator of the oppressed -- he walks among His people and hears their cries. “Christian charity is liberating when it becomes incarnate,” Pope Leo writes. “Likewise, the mission of the Church, when she is faithful to her Lord, is at all times to proclaim liberation” (*Dilexi Te*, no. 61).

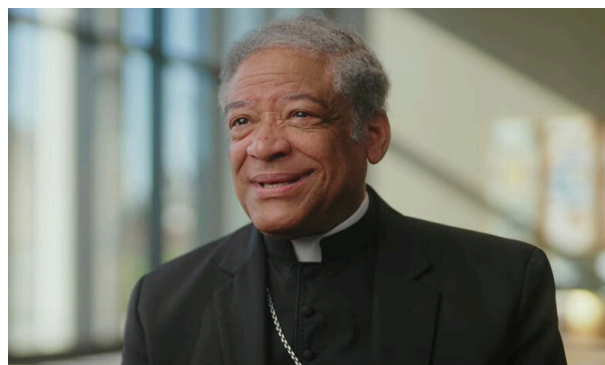
This proclamation must be accompanied by solidarity. We are called not only to serve the poor, but to walk with them, to confront the systems that perpetuate inequality.

Let us, then, recommit ourselves to this mission. Let us proclaim the liberating love of Christ, stand in solidarity with the poor and marginalized, and work tirelessly to heal the structures of oppression that wound the Body of Christ. In doing so, we fulfill the command of the Gospel: to love as He has loved us.

In Christ,

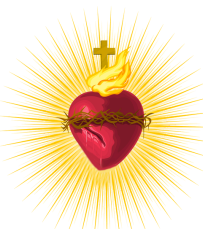


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