

Reflection for the 25th Sunday of Ordinary Time

He raises up the lowly from the dust; from the dunghill he lifts up the poor to seat them with princes, with the princes of his own people. (Psalm 113:7-8)

In our Responsorial Psalm this Sunday, we can see a message that is a part of who we are called to be as followers of Christ, as Catholics. We are called to help the poor, the needy, and the forgotten of our day and time. This message is clearly given to us this Sunday, and this message seems to be a large part of our identity as Catholics. As a Church we feel called and compelled to help those who are hurting or in need. We find this message or calling to help the less fortunate in both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible. In fact, what are called the Corporal Works of Mercy can be found in both the Book of the Prophet Isaiah and the Gospel of Matthew. These Corporal Works: feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, visiting the imprisoned, sheltering the homeless, visiting the sick, and burying the dead all focus on tending to the bodily needs of those who are truly in need. On November 30, 1980, Pope, Saint John Paul II issued the papal encyclical *Dives in Misericordia*, declaring, “*Jesus Christ taught that man not only receives and experiences the mercy of God, but that he is also called to practice mercy towards others.*”

Looking at the history of the Catholic Church we can see a very long history spanning two thousand years in which helping others, particularly the poor has been part and parcel of what it means to be Catholic. We can turn to the Acts of the Apostles in Chapter 6 and see that the Apostles asked the brethren to pick from among them seven men to act as Deacons, to help in the work of providing for the needy. The first seven Deacons are: Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicholas of Antioch. With the calling of the first Deacons in the early Church and the fact that their focus was to serve the needy, we see a great concern that the Church has had for the poor right from its founding. This concern that the Church has for the poor is rooted in scriptures and in the life of Christ.

Our local Parish continues the tradition of reaching out to the poor and the needing to this very day. We reach out to help those in need in many ways. Annually we take up a collection for the Nuestros Pequeños Hermanos Orphanage in Honduras, and many families in our Parish sponsor a child at the Home. We take up a collection four times a year in our Parish that is used by the Christian Concern Committee to help the needy in northern New Mexico pay their, rent, utilities, and other bills. Members of our Parish help every year providing gifts through the Giving Tree to help needy children embrace the joy of Christmas. The children of our Parish collect food for Thanksgiving and Christmas baskets to be donated to families in need. Members of the Parish help at two Soup Kitchens and create bags of basic items for the homeless. Our Parish like all Catholic Parishes in our Archdiocese, in our Country and in the World embrace Corporal Works of Mercy as an opportunity to follow Christ.

As members of the Catholic Church, when we reach out and help the poor, forgotten and needy of our day we are not just responding to a need, we are embracing the message of our Gospel Reading this Sunday. Today in our Gospel Reading taken from The Gospel of Luke Chapter 16 verse 9 we read; *I tell you make friends for yourselves with dishonest wealth, so that when it fails, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.* True wealth and treasure are not in this world but in the next. Our time in this world is temporary and our time in the next is eternal. So yes, we must and should use the gifts and talents that we have in this world to make a difference. As we reach out and help others in this world, we can change people's lives. But we must remember that what is important is not the change that does not last but the change that is eternal. As we focus on the needs of others, we are changed internally, and our focus changes from this passing world to the world that never ends. As a Church we have helped the poor for two thousand years and will help the poor to the end of time. This is a noble cause, and by embracing this noble cause we embrace what can change us internally so that we are ready for eternity, in the heavenly kingdom.