



Apostles for Today

Prayer and Reflection - March 2015

The Inclusion of the Poor in Society (EG 186-216) – Spiritual preparation for the General Congress of the Union in July 2015

Spiritually, the “poor” is a very rich and broad term not within our human capacity to grasp fully. It is part of the mystery of the economy of salvation. Jesus said in Matthew’s gospel, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Mt 5:3) In the ordinary sense, the poor are not blessed. Poor in this text is a blessed state and it refers to one’s spirit of total detachment from things of the world to be free for God and for his people. Anyone who has attained that blessedness will love those who suffer from the worldly poverty which leads to many basic deprivations – of food, shelter, opportunities for development, etc. - and be at their service with joy. We can see that St. Vincent had developed such a deep sense of detachment from things that even as a child he would give away things - his coat, shoes, food, etc. - to the needy. Such a love and concern is what God wants from His true worshipers. God himself is deeply concerned about the poor and needy (Is.41:17). True righteousness is to share your food and clothing with the needy (Is. 58:7)

and God will bless and strengthen the hands of those who perform such services for the poor (Is. 58:10-12). Love of the poor will be the measure used in the final judgment (Mt. 25:34-40).

There are also other dimensions of poverty in human lives. In Gn. 4:5 Cain's offering was poor and unacceptable before God because he was self-conceited and arrogant (v.9). He wanted to be accepted on his own terms. God showed him the way to make also himself pleasing before God (v.7). In spite of that, Cain not only refused to love and be concerned about his brother, but murdered him. God comes to him with great concern. "Where is your brother? What have you done?" (vv.9-10). Cain did not show any regret for his action, inviting God's wrath on himself. This is the poverty of those who have too much and are self-centred and always driven by greed for power, self-glory and possessions. We find such people everywhere and often they become the reasons for depriving others of their rights and legitimate needs and for maintaining unjust social/human systems. This happens in families, in presbyteries, in religious communities, in parishes, in organizations and between nations.

Pallotti saw in his time that even within the Church some were running around for their own glorification and leaving the people in a lot of misery. He founded the UAC as a possibility for people of all walks of life to feel at home and to feel cared for, to help bring joy and

happiness to all without cravings for oneself and with the sole aim of the infinite glory of God.

I have known from UAC groups which I have met in different parts of the world, that many have found a way in some measure to create homely communities of people of all walks of life. One such memory is from the year 2000, walking with our UAC members in Berlin on a cold night with hot soup and blankets to meet the poor sleeping on the street pavements; another was of being with the UAC members in Calicut in Kerala India, who collected Rs. 3.5 million (c. €49,500/US\$56,000) to build a house for the abandoned. These are people in the Union who belong to the “blessed poor”.

When UAC members refuse to accept and cooperate with other members of the Union they show something of the attitude of Cain and reveal their poverty of UAC spirit.

Meditate

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Mt 5:3)

“I was hungry and you gave me food ...” (Mt. 25:35-36).

“The Catholic Apostolate is common to all classes of people and consists in doing whatever anyone can and should do for the greater honour of God and for our own and our neighbour's eternal salvation” (OOCC III, p. 143).

Are all people welcome and happy in our UAC groups and gatherings?

Prayer

Lord, may the UAC communities everywhere become places of acknowledging your wonders in our midst and of glorifying your name. May we always remember our own misery and sin and praise you for your infinite mercy to call us to the Catholic Apostolate together with our brothers and sisters of other walks of life in the Union. Forgive us for the times we did not welcome them with warm love and offer our wholehearted cooperation. In your infinite mercy, include us among the “blessed poor” in your kingdom as we welcome all with totally detached and selfless love so that Christ may dwell in our inner selves, that rooted and grounded in love, we may have the power to know the breadth and the length, the height and the depth of the love of Christ (Eph. 3:17-19). In flame our hearts with the same love of Christ to enrich all members of the Union to be zealous apostles of Jesus, the Apostle of the Eternal Father. St. Vincent, our inspirer and model and Mary Queen of Apostles, our Patroness, intercede for us that we will be freed from pride and self-conceitedness and be filled with that charity which flows from the Cenacle. Amen

*Fr. Thomas Vijay SAC,
National Formation Promoter,
India*