

World Day of the Poor:

Encountering the Poor as a Way of Life

—November 19, 2017



CALL TO PRAYER

Leader: God of Love, Blessed Pope Paul VI loved to say, “all the poor belong to the Church by ‘evangelical right’ and require of us a fundamental option on their behalf.”

In the rising of the sun, remind us that holy are the welcoming hands that embrace the poor and provide comfort—they are hands that bring hope.

In the setting of the sun, remind us that holy are the hands that “reach beyond every barrier of culture, religion, and nationality, and pour the balm of consolation over the wounds of humanity.”

In the silence of the night, remind us that holy are the welcoming hands that give freely and ask nothing in return—they are hands that bring unrestricted love. Amen.

Reader 1: Pope Francis has designated November 19th as the World Day of the Poor. He invites people from all walks of life who support the poor to make this day “a tradition that concretely contributes to evangelization in today’s world.” This day of remembrance, Francis reminds us, “should become a powerful appeal to our consciences as believers, allowing us to grow in the conviction that sharing with the poor enables us to understand the deepest truth of the Gospel.” He continues, “The poor are not a problem: they are a resource from which to draw as we strive to accept and practice in our lives the essence of the Gospel.” Let us reflect on the words of Pope Francis and his invitation to love the poor, not just with kind words, but with deeds of love rooted in justice.

SCRIPTURE READING: 1 John 3:18-24

Reader 2: “My children, our love must not be simply words or mere talk—it must be true love, which shows itself in action and truth. This, then, is how we’ll know we belong to the truth; this is how we’ll be confident in God’s presence, even if our consciences condemn us. We know that God is greater than our consciences and that God knows everything. And if our consciences do not condemn us, my friends, then we have confidence before God, and we will receive whatever we ask from God’s hand—because we keep the commandments and do what is pleasing in God’s sight. The commandments are these: that we believe in the name of God’s Own, Jesus Christ, and that we love one another as we were told to do. Those who keep these commandments live in God and God lives in them. We know that God lives in us by the Spirit given to us” (The Inclusive Bible, 2007).

PRAYER SERVICE

Reader 2 invites participants to pause for a moment of silence. How does this Scripture reading speak to you?

All: God of Love, may we turn our gaze on this day to all those who stretch out their hands and plead for our help and solidarity.

Reader 3: Pope Francis shares his thoughts on this Scripture passage: “These words of the Apostle John voice an imperative that no Christian may disregard. The seriousness with which the “beloved disciple” hands down Jesus’ command to our own day is made even clearer by the contrast between the empty words so frequently on our lips and the concrete deeds against which we are called to measure ourselves. Love has no alibi. 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.”

Reader 3 invites participants to pause for a moment of silence. How can you love as Jesus loved through your actions? What are challenges to living out this radical love?

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Reader 4: Pope Francis continues, “The evangelist Luke, who more than any other speaks of mercy, does not exaggerate when he describes the practice of sharing in the early community. On the contrary, his words are addressed to believers in every generation, and thus also to us, in order to sustain our own witness and to encourage our care for those most in need.”

Reader 4 invites participants to pause for a moment of silence.. Think of two ways in which you can encourage care for those in need.

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Reader 5: Pope Francis adds, “[The Spirit] has raised up men and women who, in a variety of ways, have devoted their lives to the service of the poor. Over these two thousand years, how many pages of history have been written by Christians who, in utter simplicity and humility, and with generous and creative charity, have served their poorest brothers and sisters! ... The most outstanding example is that of Francis of Assisi, followed by many other holy men and women over the centuries.”

Reader 5 invites participants to pause for a moment of silence. Think of two people today who, like St. Francis, have devoted their lives to the service of the poor. What have you learned from them?

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Reader 6: Pope Francis elaborates, “We may think of the poor simply as the beneficiaries of our 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 the 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.”

Reader 6 invites participants to pause for a moment of silence. How does your journey of discipleship display the Gospel call to a true encounter with the poor?



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Reader 7: Pope Francis reminds us, “We are called, then, to draw near to the poor, to encounter them, to meet their gaze, to embrace them and to let them feel the warmth of love that breaks through their solitude. Their outstretched hand is also an invitation to step out of our certainties and comforts, and to acknowledge the value of poverty in itself. . . . If we want to help change history and promote real development, we need to hear the cry of the poor and commit ourselves to ending their marginalization.”

Reader 7 invites participants to pause for a moment of silence. How do you respond to the cries of today’s poor?

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Reader 8: Pope Francis voices, “We know how hard it is for our contemporary world to see poverty clearly for what it is. Yet in myriad ways poverty challenges us daily, in faces marked by suffering, marginalization, oppression, violence, torture and imprisonment, war, deprivation of freedom and dignity, ignorance and illiteracy, medical emergencies and shortage of work, trafficking and slavery, exile, extreme poverty, and forced migration. Poverty has the face of women, men, and children exploited by base interests, crushed by the machinations of power and money.”



Reader 8 invites participants to pause for a moment of silence. Where do you see faces of poverty today?

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Reader 9: Pope Francis laments, “Tragically, in our own time, even as ostentatious wealth accumulates in the hands of the privileged few, often in connection with illegal activities and the appalling exploitation of human dignity, there is a scandalous growth of poverty in broad sectors of society throughout our world. Faced with this scenario, we cannot remain passive, much less resigned.”

Reader 9 invites participants to pause for a moment of silence. How does your faith community respond to the poverty in your neighborhood, city, state, and country? If little is done to respond to the needs of the poor, what can you do to engage others to stand in solidarity with those in needs?



Reader 10: The World Day of the Poor, Pope Francis stresses, “is meant, above all, to encourage believers to react against a culture of discard and waste, and to embrace the culture of encounter. At the same time, everyone, independent of religious affiliation, is invited to openness and sharing with the poor through concrete signs of solidarity... [and] therefore, should become a powerful appeal to our consciences as believers, allowing us to grow in the conviction that sharing with the poor enables us to understand the deepest truth of the Gospel. The poor are not a problem: they are a resource from which to draw as we strive to accept and practice in our lives the essence of the Gospel.”

Reader 10 invites participants to pause for a moment of silence. Do you agree with Pope Francis that the poor are a resource from which to draw as we strive to be Gospel people? Explain. What can you learn from today’s poor?

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CLOSING PRAYER

Leader: God, you create the heavens and the earth for all;
Yet, many build barriers, walls, and fences,
Betraying the original gift intended for all humanity,
Where no one is discounted or excluded.

May we react against a culture of discard and waste,
And embrace a culture of encounter.

May we be attentive to the cries of all who suffer
From life’s uncertainties and the lack of what they need.

May we learn from the poor, the valuable lessons of life
And recognize they are our teachers
Who help us live our faith more consistently and faithfully.

May we learn from the poor’s abilities to trust
And their readiness to receive help, how to live simply,
And how to give ourselves freely and totally to God.

On this World Day of the Poor, may we grow in our conviction
That sharing with the poor allows us
To understand the deepest truth of the Gospel. Amen.

(Quotes are taken from Pope Francis’s Message for the First World Day Of The Poor, November 19, 2017, <http://bit.ly/2xVkW4D>.)

