

HOPE AND THE POOR

INTRODUCTIONS.

Themes of the Day.

KEEPING OUR EYE ON THE REAL THINGS THAT MATTER

FOR THE SSVP IN SCOTLAND.

JESUS WITH THE POOR, EXCLUDED AND NEEDY.

THE LIVED REALITIES OF THE POOR TODAY.

A FABLE ABOUT HOPE.

THE POPE'S MESSAGE.

JEAN VANIER, A MODERN PROPHET OF HOPE FOR THE POOR.

FOUR QUESTIONS THAT CHALLENGE THE SSVP SCOTLAND TODAY.

30 MINUTES OF EUCHARISTIC ADORATION.

TO SEE JESUS IN THE BLESSED SACRAMENT

and

TO SEE JESUS IN THE POOR.

.

KEEPING OUR EYE ON THE REAL THINGS THAT MATTER FOR THE SSVP IN SCOTLAND.

We as members of the SSVP are here to be energised, motivated and enthused in giving hope and help to the poor, excluded and needy.

As 60/70 members of the SSVP with that genuine Vincentian Blessed Frederick Ozanam Spirit, let us face the future that may make some of here us uncomfortable as we meet with what can be unknown. It may involve risks. You wonder whether it is the best of times or the worst of times. As we get on with the business of our lives as most ordinary people do, I feel it is important to remember we are pilgrim people. We don't have all the answers any more. It is imperative to make sure we are asking the right questions based on the real known challenges of the SSVP conferences and of the poor where we live and work. With daring spirit it would be healthy to jettison caution and security to the wind.

Let me tell you a simple story...

One day a young monk asked one of the elders why it is that so many people came out to the desert to seek God and yet most of them give up after a short time and returned to their lives in the city. And the old monastic responded: "Last evening my dog saw a rabbit running for cover among the bushes of the desert and he began to chase the rabbit, barking loudly. Soon other dogs joined the chase, barking and running. They ran a great distance and alerted many other dogs. Soon the wilderness was echoing the sounds of their pursuit, but the chase went on into the night." After a little while, many of the dogs grew tired and dropped out. A few chased the rabbit until the night was nearly spent. By morning only my dog continued the hunt.

"Do you understand," the old man said, "what I have told you?"

"No", replied the young monastic, "I don't".

"It is simple", said the desert father. "My dog saw the rabbit."

The process of redefining the SSVP conference goals for ourselves lies in learning to keep our eyes on the real things which matter. Once we know what they really are, we should never stop pursuing them.

Jesus with the Poor, Excluded and Needy.

Jesus said: "I pity these people," Mk 8,2. It was with these people that Jesus lived for over 30 years. This was the situation which He daily experienced and suffered. It was there, in that school of poor people's suffering that He grew in wisdom, age and favour before God and man, Lk 2, 52. When He was between 8 to 10, during the reign of Archelaus, He saw Palestine pass through one of the most violent periods of its history. From 12 to 30 years old, almost 20 years, He lived with his own people in Nazareth, observing their situation trying to read the signs of the time, Mt 16, 1-3.

He was born an ordinary person, poor, without the protection of a powerful class of people. He did not have the chance to study like St. Paul the Apostle, Acts 22,3. He had to work. Poverty featured in Jesus' life and was characteristic also of His mission. Jesus and His disciples had to trust in the people. Because of this, they took nothing with them, neither gold, nor silver, not even two tunics, neither bag nor sandals. Mt 10, 9-10. They had to depend on people's hospitality. Lk 9,4; 10, 5-6. In case they were not welcomed by the people, they had to work like everyone else and live on what they received in exchange for their labour. Lk 10, 7-8. Besides this, they had to look after the sick and the needy. Lk 10, 9; Mt 10,8.

On the other hand, when it came to the administration of goods, Jesus in His parables highlights the seriousness in the use of these goods. Mt 25,21,26; Lk 19, 22-23. Jesus wanted money to be always at the service of life. Lk 16, 9-13. To be poor does not mean to be lazy and neglectful.

This regard for the poor was so different and was lacking in the popular movements of the era. Each time in the Bible when they tried to renew the Covenant, they would start by re-establishing the rights of the poor and excluded. Just as prophets before used to do, likewise Jesus did. He denounced the ancient system which in God's name excluded the poor and announced a new beginning that in God's name welcomed the excluded ones.

It was in this attitude of favouring life that Jesus showed Himself to the people as He went through Galilee announcing the Good News of the Kingdom of God. Through gestures of solidarity He revealed Himself as IMMANUEL, God with us, Mt 1,23, He Himself being Good News for the people, especially for the poor and marginalized. Jesus met His death precisely because of this Good News to the poor which conflicted with the official religions of the time and the political government that strongly condemned Him. The poor, despised and exploited by the government, were His prime target, Mt 5,3; Lk 6,20.

THE POOR AND EXCLUDED UNDER THREAT WITHOUT ANY DEFENCE OR PROTECTION.

In case of sickness, plagues, failed harvests and other disasters, they were helpless as ever increasing impoverishment crippled their lives. People were full of debts and threatened to be slaves for the rest of their lives as they faced the loss of everything they had. Jesus saw the people without a shepherd, wearied of so much oppression and exploitation. Jesus lived His life surrounded by all this confusion and conflict. He saw it-even a blind man could not miss it-He heard it, lived it and keenly felt it and went through it for over 30 years.

He came that all may have life, life in abundance, Jn 10,10.

When Jesus was 30, He left home and family to lead the life of a poor wanderer with nowhere to lay His head, Lk 9, 58 to announce the Good News to the poor, Lk 19,8. There were a few rich followers of Jesus, eg. Joana, Lk 8,3, Nicodemus Jn 3, 1-2, Joseph of Arimathea, Jn 19,38 and others. Zacchaeus gave half of his goods to the poor, Lk 19,8. Our Lord recognized the richness and value that the poor possessed, Mt 11, 25/6; Lk 7, 37. He proclaimed them to be happy because the kingdom of God belongs to the poor, Lk 6,20; Mt 5,3. He declared His very mission was to announce the Good News to the poor, Lk 4,18. He Himself lived like a poor person. Those who wanted to follow Him had to choose between God and money, Mt 6, 24. Option for the poor, Mt 10,21.

SWIMMING AGAINST THE TIDE IN DEFENCE OF THE POOR.

WHAT A MAD THING TO DO...

Jesus lived with the marginalized and welcomed them. He gave a place to those who had no place in human society. He welcomed with love and affection those who were not welcomed: eg. Prostitutes and sinners –Mt 21, 31-32; Mk 2, 15; Lk 7, 37/50; Jn 8, 2/11. Heretics, pagans and Samaritans- Lk 7, 2/10; 17, 16; Mk 7, 24/30; Jn 4, 7/42. Lepers and those possessed by devils and evil spirits. Marginalised, excluded, outsiders, women, children, the sick-Mk 1,32; Mt 8, 17; 19, 13/15; Lk 8, 2 ff. Poor, peasants, powerless people.

Jesus announced the kingdom of God to everyone. He did not exclude anyone, but He announced it starting from the excluded. His choice was clear as also was His call. You cannot be a friend of Jesus and carry on supporting a system that marginalises so many many people. To those who wish to follow Him, it is God or money. You cannot serve both, Mt 19,21. Go and sell all you have and give it to the poor. After, come follow me, Mt 19,21.

JESUS WELCOMED AND VALUED WOMEN.

Women were heavily marginalised due to the fact that they were women, Lk 15, 19/27;12, 1/5. They hardly took part in the synagogue ceremonies. In public life, they could not be witnesses. Jesus was not afraid to oppose the authorities to defend marginalised and excluded women: eg. The prostitute, Lk 7, 36/50. The woman considered impure because of a blood flow, Mk 5, 25/34. Woman taken into adultery. The Samaritan woman despised and considered an heretic. She was the first person to receive the secret that Jesus is the Messiah. Mary Magdalene, considered possessed, was cured by Jesus, Lk 8,2. She was the first to tell the good News of the resurrection to the Apostles, Jn 20, 16-18. Men and women have their differences, but are equal in their dignity and value, Mt, 19, 4/5.

JESUS CONDEMNED UNFAIR DIVISIONS.

A lot of divisions existed, legalised by the official religion that marginalised lots of people. Jesus with words and concrete actions, ignored such divisions and strongly denounced neighbour vs non neighbour. Jesus told us to imitate the Good Samaritan. Jesus vs foreigner. He Himself answered the requests of the centurion, Lk 7, 6/10 and of the Canaanite, Mt.15, 21/3. Saint vs sinner. Jesus welcomed Zacchaeus and ate with sinners Mk 2,15/17. Rich vs poor. Jesus criticized and taught one cannot serve two masters, Lk 16,13. In front of such divisions, Jesus invited people to define themselves to accept or reject the new values of love and justice. Some accepted them, others rejected them. Jesus for this reason forever creates new divisions, Mt 10, 34/36 and becomes a sign of contradiction, Lk 2,34. To those who wished to follow Him, he strongly told them to be prepared for they will suffer for the very same contradiction, Mt 10, 25.

Jesus fought against HUNGER, Mk 6, 35/44. SICKNESS, Mk 1,32/34. SADNESS, Lk 7,13. IGNORANCE, Mk 1,22; 6,2. ABANDONMENT Mt 9,36. LONELINESS Mt 11,28; Mk 1, 40/41. DISCRIMINATION Mk 9, 38/40; Jn 4, 9-10. INJUSTICE Mt 5,20; Lk 22, 25/26. FEAR Mk 6,50; Mt 28, 10. SUFFERING Mt.8,17. SIN Mk 2,5. DEATH Mk 5, 41/2; Lk 7,11/17. DEMONS Mk 1, 25,34; Lk 4,13.

Jesus condemned the pretensions of the rich, Lk 6, 24;12, 13/21, Mt 6,24; Mk 10,25 and did not believe too much in their conversion, Lk 16, 29/31, although He admitted, it was possible through the power of God, Mt 19,26.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION.

1.DO WE REALLY BELIEVE IN THE POOR LIKE JESUS?

2.DO WE HEAR THEIR CRIES, THEIR SHOUTS, THEIR SCREAMS, THEIR YELLS, THEIR UNHEARD VOICES AND HARDLY REALIZE THEIR INVISIBILITY?

3.HOW MUCH /HOW LITTLE ‘ SOLIDARITY ‘ HAVE WE DISPLAYED WITH THE HUNGRY, THE THIRSTY , THE NAKED AND THE OPPRESSED? IN THE END WE WILL BE ‘JUDGED ‘ IN TERMS OF LOVE.

THE REALITIES IN THE LIVED WORLD OF THE POOR TODAY.

Reality must be faced and not resisted both inside and outside the Church. We need to get to the real facts on the ground. There is no better group than yourselves who do this. In the streets of many of our Scottish towns and cities scattered throughout the eight dioceses of Scotland, people lack the bare necessities of life. They walk the shoes off their feet going from one end of the town and city to the other in the hope of a friendly word, of getting a shelter or home, even a casual job. How often they meet with violence and abuse. Those who do find work, have to labour in harsh conditions just to receive a pittance of a salary. Faced with total insecurity, they are completely forgotten and become invisible. There's many a homeless Jesus who roams around us. How often do we see poor people going through garbage bins to find something to live on and put on used/old worn clothes. After all, the poor are most infrequently considered as priorities.

Granted life in our world of today is very complex, fluid and full of risks and uncertainty. One thing is sure, according Gustavo Gutierrez, the poor person does not exist as an inescapable fact of destiny. HIS/HER EXPERIENCE IS NOT POLITICALLY NEUTRAL, OR IT IS NOT ETHNICALLY INNOCENT. The poor are a by-product of the system in which we live and for which we are responsible. They are marginalized by our social and cultural world...the poverty of the poor is not a call to generous relief action, but a demand that we go and build a different social order. 20% of humankind control 80% of all the means of life. That fact creates a dangerous imbalance in the movement of history.

One easily detects unrestrained greed that is ruthless. The commitment of self-serving wealth is limitless among us to the extent that the control of wealth flows from the basis of globalized trade with its cheap labour force. The advance of the private self, the possessive individual, at the expense of the common good. Everything is raw competition. There is also a pervasive sense of 'end time', the end of the world scenarios. Such end of the world anxiety indicates that the present world with its violence is felt unsustainable. The unsustainability of the present systems of power, goods and access makes one feel the threat : 'it's everyman/ everywoman, for himself, herself'. ' You are on your own '. ' We are abandoned'.

St.Oscar Romero strongly insisted : " The ones who have a voice must speak for those who are voiceless. Which means that a church that does not provoke any crises, a gospel that doesn't unsettle, a word of God that doesn't get under anyone's skin, a word of God that does not touch the real sin of the society in which it is being proclaimed-what gospel is that? "

When the Church hears the cry of the oppressed it cannot but denounce the social structures that give rise to and perpetuate the misery from which the cry arises.

THERE ARE MANY THINGS THAT CAN ONLY BE SEEN THROUGH EYES THAT HAVE CRIED AND HAVE SUFFERED GRIEVOUSLY.

The rich fail to recognise the weak, poor and vulnerable as legitimate members of society. This is evident in arrogance, pride and self-indulgence as they imagine themselves to be centre of the universe and are not accountable to anyone for anything. They manage the economy in their own interests to the detriment of others. The structure of creation will not yield to big power or big money or big knowledge. Biblically speaking, poverty is a scandalous condition, inimical to human dignity and, hence, contrary to the will of God.

In the heart of the pilgrim People of God there beats that saving power which excludes no one and involves everyone in a real journey pilgrimage of conversion to recognise the poor and to love them. In fact, the eternal destiny of human beings will be measured by how much or how little solidarity we have displayed with the hungry, the thirsty, the naked and the oppressed. In the end we will judged in terms of love. Once again, St Oscar Romero , champion of the El Salvadoran poor, reminds us : "When we speak for the poor, please note that we do not take sides with one social class. What we do is to invite all social classes, rich and poor, without distinction, saying to everyone let us take seriously the cause of the poor as though it were our own." Pope Francis , in *Evangelii Gaudium*, paragraph 196, highlights that the option for those who are least, those whom society discards, is a priority that Christ' followers are called to pursue.

HOPE. WALTER KASPER.

What is hope? There is a fable called " The Flower in the Desert ". It can help us with this question.

There was once a small flower growing in the middle of the desert Each day, the flower waited for a drop of rain.. Someone had once told the flower how important and beautiful rain is. But, every time it began to smell of rain, the hot sun returned and all hope was snatched away.. In pain, the little flower remained in the parched soil and was afraid : afraid of the scorching heat, afraid of loneliness, afraid of the next storm. A hummingbird saw the flower's sadness and told the other animals about

it., but the bull had no interest . For him, only what was strong counted. The St. Bernard also remained unmoved. And the magpie, always singing great tunes, said she had too many appointments and therefore really no time. Then the humming bird was desperate. What was he, the smallest of all the birds, to do? Then, making up his mind, he whirled over to the ants and told them of the great sadness of the flower. Without hesitating, the tiny ants formed a long chain and dragged hay seed and bits of earth to the sorrowful plant. They wet it with a bit of dew, and it was not long before life grew there in the middle of the desert, and the little flower developed a radiant glow that no one had ever believed it capable of showing. All this was only possible because the hummingbird had notified the ants. So what is hope?

Hope is a force that can change the world and make it thrive. No one can live without hope. Without hope, we wither like the little flower. Thus it is important that an individual human being not sit silently alone hoping for himself, he must communicate his wishes and hopes to others, gaining friends. Where two persons have hope in common, the first step toward fulfilment is already taken. The hummingbird noticed what the little flower was missing. The bird worked so that the flower could hope again that things could get better. He helped the flower to bloom again so it could bring joy to others as well. God wants to give hope to all. To spread hope, that is our task.

POPE'S SPEECH.

The poor will never be forgotten. God will never abandon the poor. The hope of the humble never will be frustrated. God does not abandon us. God defends the poor in whatever place where there is oppression. God's presence manifests itself in the struggle for justice, in defending the rights of the poor, in the triumph over evil and badness.

There is need for profound changes in lifestyles, models of production and corruption and the established structures of power which today govern society, paragraph 5. Pope Francis reminds us that there is also an intimate relationship between the poor and fragile earth, LAUDATO SI paragraph 16. Solidarity, compassion, caring and loving, such values and inner powers can lay the foundation of a new paradigm of civilization, the civilization of the humanity reunited in the Common House, on the Planet Earth. Our mission is to celebrate the greatness of Creation and connect it again to the Core where it came from and to where it will go with care, lightness, joy, reverence and love.

The hope of the poor is confirmed in the certainty that their voice is heard by the Lord, that in Him they will find justice, that their hearts will be strengthened and continue to love, PS 10,17.

IT'S EXACTLY THIS TRUST IN GOD, THE CERTAINTY OF NOT BEING FORSAKEN THAT GENERATES HOPE. Such manifestations of courage are based on THE ASSURANCE OF THINGS HOPED FOR, THE CONVICTION OF THINGS NOT SEE. Heb.11,1.

Realistically, the poor must feel it. Just imagine their lived experience in the context of a sense of loss, vulnerability and abandonment. Their deep needs challenge God's fidelity, His steadfast love, mercy and faithfulness. God does not forsake nor forget or neglect. The many poor must often draw close to despair. How can they not? At times they must have little grounds for trusting due to their experiences of sadness, shock, despair , horror and even a sense of God's absence.

Hope is out beyond what we know. It does not mean to know the future but hope provides the prospect of a future. It is enacted with tenacity. It is an audacious claim said to be the very word of God that stands forever –Is. 40,8, that will accomplish that which is proposed-Is 55,11, a word that is ‘in your mouth a fire ‘ Jer 5, 14, that “ cannot be held in ”Jer 20,9.

To bolster hope the Church has to be seen close to the poor. Loving attentiveness is the beginning of true concern for the poor and the promotion of their genuine welfare, Evangelii Gaudium 199.

“ The poor need our hands, to be lifted up; our hearts, to feel anew the warmth of attention, to overcome loneliness, in a word, they need love ”, THIRD WORLD DAY OF THE POOR, 17/11/2019, paragraph 8.

The poor are not statistics to cite when boasting of our works and projects. The poor are persons to be encountered; they are lonely, young and old, to be invited to our homes to share a meal; men, women and children who look for a friendly word. The poor save us because they enable us to encounter the face of Jesus Christ. You and I well know there is a great need to revive hope and restore confidence in so many places where we live and work with the SSVP.

JEAN VANIER, A MODERN PROPHET OF HOPE FOR THE POOR.

1928 – 2019.

His witness changed the lives of countless people with grave disabilities. He heard the cry of the poor and produced unwavering hope showing concrete signs of love. This tall, handsome ex-naval officer was a true example of discipleship. Like a spiritual giant, Jean was a man of action and prayer. He went to daily Mass and spent half an hour in prayer each day. He was truly blessed with a gentleness, wisdom and insight, simplicity, depth and faith. With genuine transparency, he opted, not for the great and powerful of this world, but for the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind. In his many life- long encounters with the poorest and weakest in society, especially those with intellectual disabilities, this world of pain and shame, taught him many a thing: “ We are healed by the most vulnerable people in life .” They are great “ teachers of tenderness .” “ If you are blind to the poor, you become blind to God .” “ If you share your life with the poor, they will change you “. “ The poor are a path towards God .” “ They are “ messengers from God who bring us closer to Jesus .” “ Stay close to Jesus. Be with the poor .” He lived and preached that true Catholic communion in which no one is ignored or belittled and every-one has something to give. He once told this moving story in front of St.John Paul II : I want to tell you about a little man called Antonio. He died last week. **He was one of the frailest members of our community and yet was at its heart. Jean Vanier was describing one of the most disabled people he had ever met : paraplegic, dumb – and yet with a radiant smile which produced an extraordinary communion around him. God uses people like Antonio to announce His kingdom.**

Jean Vanier spread hope. He has left behind him 149 L’Arche communities in 38 countries-two of which are in Inverness and Edinburgh, where ‘normal’ people share family-sized built houses with men and women who have mental handicaps, united in the firm belief that God chooses what is weak to confuse the strong. Indeed, we have to welcome and honour all people and give them their place. Our prophet of hope was able to do this as he mingled daily with the poor.

A WEE BLETHER.

Like Jean Vanier, do we really care about those who come to us?

How many first of their names do we recall?

Do our words to them come from our hearts? Warm or cold?

How can we show those who come to us really feel loved?

“ A ride in the forest ” film.

FOUR QUESTIONS THAT CHALLENGE THE SSVP IN SCOTLAND TODAY.

Together with Brother Renato Lima de Oliveira, the Portuguese international leader of the SSVP, I'd like to ask some four relevant questions on how to improve your invaluable work of service in hope for the poor, marginalized and needy at home here in the seven dioceses of Scotland.

WHAT DO WE NEED TO STOP DOING IN THE SSVP?

WHAT DO WE NEED TO KEEP DOING TO IMPROVE OUR VINCENTIAN EFFECTIVENESS?

WHAT DO WE NEED TO DO MORE?

WHAT DO WE NEED TO DO LESS?

Let's not forget the SSVP-Scotland has been going strongly for 175 years. During this time only God knows how much love, compassion and understanding for the poor , excluded and needy literally the thousands of SSVP members in the spirit of St.Vincent de Paul, St. Louise de Marillac and Fred-rick Ozanam have given their time, their talents, their concern and friendship to help others.

EUCCHARISTIC ADORATION.

TO SEE JESUS IN THE BLESSED SACRAMENT AND TO SEE JESUS IN THE POOR.

“ If you cannot see Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament you will never see Him in the poor .”

St Mother Teresa of Calcutta.

Hymn : Be Still for the Presence of the Lord...

Prayer.

LORD OUR GOD.

WE PRAISE AND THANK YOU FOR THE PRESENCE OF JESUS

IN THE GREAT SACRAMENT OF THE EUCHARIST.

HELP US TO SEE HIM ALSO IN OUR POOR BROTHERS AND SISTERS.

HELP US TO APPRECIATE HIS LOVE FOR THEM.

WE ASK THIS IN HIS NAME THROUGH CHRIST OUR LORD. AMEN.

Story of the Rock

The Bible clearly shows God's option for the poor and marginalized. Jesus too was deeply concerned in His life and ministry for them too.

IS.4, 16-21. All who are weakest and powerless. They are the poor, the little people, incapable to stand up for themselves. By reason of their need and sorry state they are God's cherished ones.

The poor really do need help. The hungry stand in need of food, the mourning are visibly mourning.

All cry out for compassion. Jesus knew these people like the back of his hand. These people are not those He proclaimed as saints or models of virtue, but folk literally down and out. The kingdom of God, the consolation of the new age is granted to the weak and despised- to those who suffer, weep and are broken hearted. The wretched lot of the poor will be reversed under the rule of God, Lk 52-3.

ST. MATTHEW 25, 35-40.

Reflection into silence.

As you sit here in the presence of the Jesus who gives Himself to us in this amazing sacrament :

Listen to Him in the silence of your heart.

Ask Him to be with you in every moment of every day.

+Thank Him for being with you in every moment of every day.

+Tell Him about how you want to recognise Him more and more in the poor and suffering.

+Thank Him for all He has done and continues to do for the poor through the work of the SSVP.

+Ask Him to be with you in everything you do.

ADORE.

SIT OR KNEEL IN THANKSGIVING.

BOW YOUR HEAD IN PRAYER.

ADORE HIM BY PRAYING:

Jesus I praise and thank you.

A LITANY OF THE BLESSED SACRAMENT.

THREE DROPS OF WINE AND ONE OF WATER.I DREAM OF A CHURCH.

Francis Xavier Nguyen van Thuan.

CLOSING EUCHARISTIC HYMN : COLOURS OF DAY.

