

Mother of God Community
Sunday Night Prayer Meeting
June 22, 2014
Evangelii Gaudium, Chapter 4
Terri Celmer

An exhortation is meant to elicit a response, or at least a reaction. Terri identified 4 types of responses: “Amen”, the “cut to the heart”, “walking away” or “indifferent”. These correspond to the 4 types of soil in Jesus’ parable of the Sower and the Seed in Matthew 13.

Chapter 4 of *Evangelii Gaudium* covers the Social Dimension of Evangelization. Terri focused on material in paragraphs 186-216.

Paragraph 187

Each individual Christian and every community is called to be an instrument of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor, and for enabling them to be fully a part of society. This demands that we be docile and attentive to the cry of the poor and to come to their aid. A mere glance at the Scriptures is enough to make us see how our gracious Father wants to hear the cry of the poor: “I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them... so I will send you...” (Ex 3:7-8, 10). We also see how he is concerned for their needs: “When the Israelites cried out to the Lord, the Lord raised up for them a deliverer” (Jg 3:15). If we, who are God’s means of hearing the poor, turn deaf ears to this plea, we oppose the Father’s will and his plan; that poor person “might cry to the Lord against you, and you would incur guilt” (Dt 15:9). A lack of solidarity towards his or her needs will directly affect our relationship with God: “For if in bitterness of soul he calls down a curse upon you, his Creator will hear his prayer” (Sir 4:6). The old question always returns: “How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods, and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?” (1 Jn 3:17). Let us recall also how bluntly the apostle James speaks of the cry of the oppressed: “The wages of the labourers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts” (5:4).

In Paragraph 188, our Holy Father tells us our response is to be threefold 1) to eliminate the structural causes of poverty, 2) to promote the integral development of the poor, and 3) to express daily acts of solidarity in meeting the real needs which we encounter. This calls for the creation of a new mindset which thinks in terms of community and the priority of the life of all over the appropriation of goods by a few.

Being a covenant community, we have some experience of thinking in terms of community, the priority of the life of all the members over the wants of a few. Pope Francis is asking us to take this lesson which we have come to practice in the Community and through a deeper conversion to Christ expand our hearts, stretch our resources, go out and relieve the suffering of our brothers and sisters, and widen our nets to welcome the outcasts of society into our fellowship here in Mother of God. Mary is the mother of the poor; we ought to be more like her.

Go out of ourselves

A fruit of an authentic encounter with the Lord (in prayer, conversion experience, SNPM) is a going out to the other. Following the Annunciation, Mary goes to help Elizabeth (Luke 1:30-31, 38-40); the Samaritan woman goes into town and evangelizes the other townspeople; a poor family in India shares

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their meal with their neighbor. Contrast that with how the disciples struggle with being generous (Mark 6:34-37) and the one forgiven much can't seem to show mercy to his fellow man (Matthew 18:21-35).

Eliminating the Structural Causes of Poverty

Promoting the Integral Development of the Poor

Making connections

Who are the poor? Also ask the Lord who are "God's poor" – the faces of the poor on my path?

The Pope's call to action

Whether we are talking about eliminating the structural causes of poverty, or promoting the dignity and human development of those who are poor, or making connections and forming genuine relationships, it can remain a lot of talk and no action. Pope Francis recognizes this and says, "I fear that these words too may give rise to commentary and discussion with no real practical effect" (Para 201). This is a great danger.

Para 207 "Any Church community, if it thinks it can comfortably go its own way without creative concern and effective cooperation in helping the poor to live with dignity and reaching out to everyone, will also risk breaking down, however much it may talk about social issues and criticize governments. It will easily drift into a spiritual worldliness camouflaged by religious practices, unproductive meetings and empty talk."

In the early church, the leaders in Jerusalem told St Paul that his missionary work would prove authentic if the communities he established were not self-serving. Christian communities cannot afford to be self-absorbent, lest they lose their soul – the Holy Spirit, and their compass. True North is the love of God and love of neighbor.

Inclusion of the Poor in the church community

Not simply as recipients of care from the Christian community but fellow members of the body of Christ, fellow servants of the Lord, fellow evangelists building His kingdom. Would we be receptive if one of the Lord's poor, God's little ones, prophesied in our prayer meeting, or led our worship, gave a teaching, laid hands on us for fuller portion of the Holy Spirit?

Sadly, many Christians are guilty of favoritism or being prejudiced in our relations in the body of Christ. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' note on James 2:1-10 reads: "In the Christian community there must be no discrimination or favoritism based on status or wealth. When Christians show favoritism to the rich they are guilty of the worst kind of prejudice and discrimination. The author of James says that such Christians set themselves up as judges who judge not by divine law but by the basest, self-serving motives." <http://www.usccb.org/bible/james/2>

Where we have sinned in the past due to self-serving motives or that in any way we discriminate against people based on talent, wealth, education, or health let us confess our sin and may the poor forgive us.