

Dear Parishioners,

Charity is so much more than giving for the sake of giving. There is an interesting phenomenon with charity; it feels good to give. We know that when we share something of what we have with others we get this wonderful feeling of knowing we have helped. When we have this feeling we might be tempted to give for the sake of giving. Another example of giving for the sake of giving is when we decide to give a little chunk of our excess because the Church tells us we should. When this is our motivation for being charitable we are, at times, reluctant in our generosity.

In their pastoral letter, Stewardship: A Disciple's Response, the United States Bishops offer four characteristics for Christian stewardship. A Christian Steward...

- 1 – Receives God's gifts gratefully,
- 2 – Cherishes and tends them in a responsible and accountable manner,
- 3 – **Shares them with justice and love for others**, and
- 4 – Returns them with increase to the Lord.

Our motivation for charity ought to be justice and love. When we think of justice from a legal point of view we often consider "Lady Justice" which is a statue of a blind-folded woman holding the scales of justice and those scales are balanced. When we think about charity, this image is an appropriate one. But we have to keep in mind the understanding that the scales are not balanced.

Most of the world lives in extreme poverty. There are many cities, villages, and communities in which the vast majority of people have no jobs and no way of providing food or shelter for their families while we build castles right here in our own town, and most of us have far more food and provisions than we would ever need. Our children do not starve to death within the first few weeks of their lives. Most of our families have good shelter; a worthy place to call home. Most of us also have good jobs that enable us to afford the kind of lifestyle we choose to live. There are times when we struggle, but we do not have to go without any of the basic necessities of life.

So there is economic imbalance in the world and, in justice, we who are Catholic and Christian are called to do something about it. We choose to be generous to the poor because the gospels demand that the imbalance be corrected. In order for this to happen we have to be able to see the imbalance and the ways it impacts the lives of so many people.

In the winter of 1987 I spent each Saturday working at St. John Center, in Louisville Kentucky where the homeless could come in for a simple breakfast, a cup of coffee, a shower, to put on some clean clothes, or to just sit and rest. One man was sitting alone at a table with a cup of coffee in his hands. He was just staring at the steam rising from his cup. He was very angry. I sat down with him to visit for a few minutes and he told me about the night he spent trying to sleep on the concrete beneath an overpass. All the mission shelters were full and besides, he didn't have a ticket to get into any of them.

He just looked at me and told me to leave; he didn't want to talk with me. When I asked him why he said it was because he didn't have anything he wanted to say to me. He didn't think I would understand what it means to be homeless. He didn't think I would have the compassion to empathize with his situation. He saw a seminarian who was being educated on someone else's dime. He saw a guy who had a stable place to be every night. He just assumed that I wouldn't care because there was nothing I could do to change his life around.

The imbalance between the rich and the poor exists everywhere on this planet AND THERE **IS** SOMETHING WE CAN DO ABOUT IT! But in order for us to help we have to recognize the poverty, see it, touch it, maybe even experience it in our own lives and out of simple love for the poor we decide we are going to do what we can to try and move those scales closer and closer to the balanced position.

All we really have to do is feed the hungry, give refreshment to the thirsty, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, visit the sick and the imprisoned knowing that every time we do these things for the least of our brothers and sisters we do them for Jesus Christ. If we ever want to know where Christ is on this planet, all we have to do is see him in the poor, and then love him enough to share our own lives with him.

In joyful hope,
Fr. Tim Seigel