



PASTORAL LETTER OF ARCHBISHOP GEORGE STACK
FOR SUNDAY 19th NOVEMBER 2017 – 33rd SUNDAY OF THE YEAR
FIRST WORLD DAY OF PRAYER OF THE POOR

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

This Sunday, the Thirty Third Sunday of the Church's Year, has been designated by Pope Francis as the First World Day of the Poor. His Pontificate has already been marked by a distinct concern for the poor and marginalised. This has attracted the attention of people far beyond the confines of the Catholic Church. The Pope has asked all Christians to refresh our understanding of the nature of poverty and our responsibilities to all who are poor. He reminds us that it is too easy to regard the poor as being far away and in need of material support alone. Material poverty is one thing. Poverty of spirit is another.

Whilst individual acts of generosity and service are always meaningful as expressions of Christian charity, each person is called to exercise a deeper and more personal commitment to the relief of poverty in whatever form it presents itself. The move from transactional to transformational is the language of theologians and is helpful in responding to the challenges facing society today. Pope Francis identifies all who have become marginalised in society as suffering from poverty – the homeless, the addict, the refugee. Poverty can be found in lack of opportunity or in isolation and unjust discrimination. The elderly and infirm may be numbered amongst the poor when they are particularly in need of our care and compassion. Members of the Church are called to be a listening Church, remembering the words of Psalm 34:

The Lord hears the cry of the poor. Blessed be the Lord.

In challenging the Church to respond to this World Day of the Poor, Pope Francis writes:

“We are called 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 itself”.

Thus the poor are not merely recipients of generosity. They are not a problem to be solved, but a route towards our own salvation. In the poor, we are able to see Jesus, remembering his words *“When you did this to the least of my brothers, you did it to me”*. This will often demand a new relationship with the poor. It needs a dynamic re-assessment of our capacity to respond to the challenges facing us all in society, not least in challenging the structures of injustice which so often dispossess people of rights and responsibilities. The Archdiocese of Cardiff has a proud record of work with the poor. The recent celebration of the charism of St. Vincent de Paul is testimony to the good work undertaken by the members and so many others who reach out to their neighbour.

Each Deanery in the Diocese has done some preparation for the celebration of Mass on this First World Day of the Poor. Hopefully each parish will respond in a like-minded manner with materials provided by CARITAS so that we may respond personally and collectively to the *“... new forms of poverty and vulnerability in which we are called to recognise the suffering Christ.” (Evangelii Gaudium 210)*. Representatives from each Deanery will meet at The Cornerstone this afternoon to explore what action might be initiated throughout the Diocese as result of this special day. There will be an opportunity to listen to some people who are or have been at the margins of society. Hopefully, together, we may create that Civilisation of Love spoken of by Pope Paul VI in our homes, our parishes, our schools and our Diocese.

Thank you for all that is already done for the poor. On this special day, we pray that the Lord will raise up those who are bowed down for any reason whatsoever.

Yours devotedly,

+George Stack

Archbishop of Cardiff