

28<sup>th</sup> Sun (A)

15<sup>th</sup> October 2017

'Love in Action IV: Preferential Option for the Poor'

Is 25:6–10, “a banquet of fine wines”      Ps 22: “you have prepared a banquet for me”  
Phil 4: “ready for anything, full stomach or empty”  
Mt 22:1–14, inviting all to the Son’s wedding banquet.

In today’s Gospel passage, God is inviting all and sundry into His kingdom, and to the banquet that is an image of heaven. Even in the Old Testament reading, the Lord is seen as preparing a feast of “food rich and juicy, of fine strained wines” for all peoples. This is the ‘Messianic banquet’ — the divine celebration that accompanies the marriage of the Son of God to the human race. In Jesus, God threw open the invitation to the whole world. No longer was the Lord just the God of Israel, now He was inviting all peoples, “good and bad alike” — the Gospel had to be preached to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. The invitation from God to join Him in His heavenly kingdom is for all peoples, not just for a few keen pious followers, but for every single person on this planet.

But even as we look forward to the ‘banquet of heaven,’ we have to have concern also in this life for the flourishing (the feeding!) of peoples on earth, and a constant

theme in the Scriptures, in the teaching of Jesus, and in the Church’s 2000-yr doctrine is the care for the poor. We do not exist to serve only the people of our own immediate acquaintance — we exist to further the whole family of mankind, ... and that has to begin with the service of the poor. To be a Christian is to look at each and every person with the eyes of Christ, and to come to the aid of those in peril, especially those whose very existence is precarious because of drought and famine, war and migration, crop failure and natural catastrophe. Huge proportions of the planet still live in poverty. About 60% of the world population live on less than \$5/day; and about 10% live on less than \$1/day. Such figures are hard to comprehend when in our own society we think in terms of 10s of pounds a day income. Except for what we see graphically on the news from time to time, it’s easy to put out of our minds the poverty, and extreme hardship of much of the world.

Pope Francis has made it a hallmark of his papacy, from day1, that the Church be ever mindful of the poor. He says this to us: “*Our faith in Christ, who became poor, and*

*was always close to the poor and outcast, is the basis of our concern for the integral development of society's most neglected members."* Given that we follow Our Lord in all things, His attitude to the poor and marginalized has also to be our own attitude. This doesn't mean just throwing money at the situation, any more than tossing a coin at a distance into a beggar's bowl is an acceptable way of treating someone's dignity. Of course, our financial contributions to the support of the poor is very important — just as we took up our CaFOD collection last Sunday — but this cannot be the limit of our concern. We need to feel close to the poor, to live simply, and respect the poor. The Pope has also said to us: *"[The poor] have much to teach us ... In their difficulties they know the suffering Christ. We need to let ourselves be evangelized by them. ... We are called to find Christ in them, to lend our voices to their causes, but also to be their friends, to listen to them, to speak for them and to embrace the mysterious wisdom which God wishes to share with us through them."*

We should not judge someone well on the size or

luxury of their house, but if anything the opposite: he who lives simply, relying on the basics, is more likely to be close to God. I am always struck by that quotation in the book of Proverbs: *"Give me neither poverty nor riches. Grant me only my share of food, for fear that, surrounded by plenty, I should fall away and say, 'The Lord? Who is the Lord?'"* And we can add to that, of course, the famous first beatitude in the Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are the Poor in Spirit, theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven." Our Lord urges us constantly to simplicity of life, to adopt 'poverty in spirit' in order not to get caught up in the treadmill of earning and spending, and instead to see money and possessions as secondary to the spiritual and emotional care of one another, which can be done with far less by way of financial resources.

**Qn: In what ways should we live, then, so as to be close to the poor, in spirit as well as in what we donate in aid? Can we live simply? Reach out to those lonely or poor in our neighbourhood? Speak to the one begging? Contribute to the foodbank? Live as the Lord lived?**