

The Virtue of Poverty- 1

Lourdes Pinto

2/11/20

On this feast day of Our Lady of Lourdes, we consecrate this teaching on the virtue of poverty to our Most Holy Mother as we begin our Lenten Retreat as a community.

The Lord ended with this one sentence, a message He gave us in 2011:

***Poverty** brings forth **Chastity**, and Chastity brings forth **obedience**, which is the essence of Love (Simple Path #66, p.204)*

On another occasion, the Lord spoke these words:

My ways are not the ways of the world. Meditate on My life and the life of the Holy Family. We were rich in the graces of Abba, our Father, but always poor in the things of this world. You cannot aspire in your hearts for both; that is why, to follow Me, you must leave everything. You must aspire to be poor in the world and rich in virtue. (1/14/21)

Let us begin our reflection with a meditation on the parable of the “Rich Fool” (Luke 12:13-21). The Lord begins the Gospel account by saying: *take heed and beware of all covetousness, for a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions* (12:15). Then, the Lord goes on to tell the story of the rich man who, with great confidence, decides to build a larger barn to secure for himself the riches of his abundant crop. He says, *So is he who lays up treasures for himself and is not rich toward God* (12:21). At the end of the parable, the Lord says, *Fool* (12:20), because his life was being called of him that night. What, we must ask, was all that storing worth in the end? Let this be our meditation as we grow in the virtue of poverty. The focus of this parable by the Lord was not on what the man stored but on what is in our hearts.

Let me start with an example of a story of the life of St. Alphonsus Liguori. In 1763-1764, there was a horrible famine in Italy. St Alphonsus knew that the Lord would send a famine, a time of tribulation for the people because they had moved very far from God. As I was reading this story, I could not help but see the similarities to what we are living now with the Covid pandemic. So, what did St. Alphonsus, who was bishop, do? He started to warn the people, prophesizing, “Beware you who live only for sensual, voluptuous pleasure; God will punish you by famine.” As a true shepherd, he began to warn his people to repent and to turn their eyes and hearts to God. But the people lived in abundance and paid no attention to Alphonsus’s words. In the end, the terrible famine he prophesized came. The interesting thing is what St Alphonsus did in for-seeing the terrible famine that was coming; he began storing provisions in his lofts. In appearance, he did the same thing as the rich young man, but with one big difference: the intention of his heart.

When the famine hit, many people were starving; even those who had lived in abundance found themselves starving to death. In just one year, in that small area of Italy, 300,000 people died. So, when the famine came, St Alphonsus opened his lofts and started distributing all his provisions and food to the starving people. He gave everything until there was no more food

left. Then he sold his watch, his carriage, and even his horse. His staff complained, “You can’t give away everything; you’re the bishop! A man of your stature needs these things.” He said, “Absolutely not!” He would take a little soup and some boiled meat each day so that the rest could be given to the starving people.

Here, you see two different souls; the first, the rich fool in the parable, was storing up for only himself. His heart did not live to desire God. The second, St Alphonsus, on the other hand, was the opposite. His heart, first and foremost, was seeking God and seeking to be rich in virtue. I thought of these times we are living. Many have listened to the prophecies, are aware of the times we have entered, and feel called to store up provisions. Is there anything wrong with that? Absolutely not! We must ask ourselves: “Am I detached enough to be willing to share whatever I have stored with whoever may be in need at the time?” Have our hearts, yours and mine, grown enough in love and charity to be willing to sacrifice myself, giving all I have to others solely for love? In the answer to that lies the actual difference.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states:

The Lord grieves over the rich because they find consolation in the abundance of goods. “Let the proud seek and love earthly kingdoms, but blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Abandonment to the providence of the Father in heaven frees us from anxiety about tomorrow. Trust in God is a preparation for the blessedness of the poor. They shall see God.

As I went back to listen to the teaching we had on poverty in 2018, based on the parable of the “Rich Young Man” found in the Gospel of Luke, I discovered the correlation between growth in the spirit of poverty and TRUST. I understood how the Holy Spirit has been forming us, making us rich in the virtues of humility, faith, and purity, and now He brings us back to poverty. I want to focus on poverty again, but this time, I want to focus on the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the desires of our hearts.

If we continue reading the Gospel of Luke, it speaks to us a lot about anxiety and fear (Luke 12: 22-31). The Lord tells us, *Oh men of little faith, do not seek what you are to eat or what you are to drink nor be of anxious mind* (v. 28-29). He then says, *Your Father knows that you need these things. Instead, seek his kingdom and these things shall be yours as well* (v.30). Our growth in poverty can be measured to the extent of the desire of our heart to seek more and more only God, aspiring union with God, aspiring to be rich in virtue, not the things of the world, that is proper growth in poverty. The Lord then goes on to say, *Sell your possessions and give alms; provide yourself with purses that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys, for where your treasure is there will your heart be also.* (v.33)

We cannot grow in poverty if we think only about giving alms. If someone gives alms by helping a mission in Africa, helping orphans, helping a convent, or helping prisoners, those are all wonderful and important. Yet, there is a danger of falling into the trap of feeling good about ourselves. It’s like we have a little checklist with God, “look at all the good things I have done!” If I do all those things and I am not dying to self, dying to my ego, dying to my disordered

desires, there may be a lack of purity even in my almsgiving if there remains still a lot of self in me. This limits our ability to grow deeper in the virtue of poverty.

In the Gospel of Luke, the Lord gives us several examples of charity in giving alms. In chapter 8, we find several wealthy women like Johana, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna. These were wealthy disciples of Christ. These women traveled with the Lord and financially supported Jesus' mission. He saw the intent of their hearts in their generosity and honored them. The Lord does not expect us to leave all behind and be left with no financial means on earth; that's not what the Lord says.

In another example in the Gospel, we see the Lord reprimanding the Pharisees for their giving of alms, saying, *Woe to you Pharisees, for you tithe mint and rue and every herb and neglect justice and the love of God, these you ought to have done without neglecting the others* (Luke 11:42). He saw how their tithing was to fulfill the law, whereas within their hearts they lacked love, they were full of pride and arrogance.

Years ago, St. Jose Maria Escriva was interviewed about the virtue of poverty. He said, "True poverty should be an expression of faith in God and a sign that the heart is not satisfied with created things and aspires to the Creator. It wants to be filled with the love of God so that it can give the same love to everyone."

We see how our focus on the desires of the heart becomes a means for growth in poverty. These next few weeks, we will focus on a teaching from Our Lord from 2018 called the "Mission of the 12." Tonight, the focus will be on these two sentences:

A victim soul must fix his eyes on Christ, must desire with all his being to become one with his Master, must be willing to learn from Him and imitate Him. He must be willing to fight against all his disordered desires. 1/30/18

Here are some questions to reflect upon:

1. Do I truly desire, with all my being, to become one with my Master, one with Love Crucified?
2. What other desires in my heart get in the way of this first desire?

My community it is so easy for us to deceive ourselves. It's so easy to say I'm not attached to the things of the world. The other day, I started to make a list, as I'm asking you to do. I began to write all the desires of my heart. I found I had many good desires but also saw how attached I was to certain comforts. I started to think, I like my pillow, comfortable mattress, and many other things. Honestly, with the Lord, I had to laugh with Him at myself. It is so beautiful when we can laugh at ourselves, be transparent, and unveil ourselves before our beloved Jesus Christ, for it is then that He can do wonders with us. He loves it!

I spoke to someone in accompaniment today, and she was so real and transparent even while telling me some very deep things. I just felt like hugging her. Hearing someone so real, transparent, and honest was so refreshing in my soul. I just looked at her and said, "If I love you

so much because of your transparency, I can only imagine the delight in Our Blessed Mother and Our Lord, how delighted they are to hear you.” That is how the Lord loves us to be.

The mortification of the passions of our flesh is not enough in and of itself. The desire to mortify our disordered desires is the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, awakening the desire to grow in holiness. Mortifying our passions is a good and essential process, but we must go deeper and purify our hearts to attain pure love. Our desires must be purified in the fire of the Sacred Heart of Jesus until our desires are one with His—the burning desire for the Cross, solely for the love of God and the salvation of souls. In this one desire—the Cross, is the perfection of all the virtues because there is pure love. Jesus Christ in Luke speaks of this burning desire; He says, *I came to cast fire upon the earth and would that it were already kindled. I have a baptism to be baptized with and how I am constrained until it is accomplished.* (Luke 12: 49-50). Jesus is speaking about His death on the Cross, His total oblation, the fire.

Let me give you another example of this purification of desire. I have spoken with and heard many throughout the years in the community share with me how God has moved them to live close to their parents. I have had the honor of walking with some of these souls through this transition, where God has placed them close to the family they have a tough time loving, including mothers and fathers who were very difficult to get along with. I spoke with one woman recently, and she said, “I know why the Lord has moved me here because I need to grow to learn to be able to love my parents.” The truth is that there are souls in our lives, in our families, who are very difficult to get along with. Why? Because they are so broken. They are so wounded. They are dysfunctional families that live so oppressed. They live in anger, hatred, hardness of heart, harshness, constant yelling, criticism, and manipulation. It is challenging for most of us to be close to that. And yet, the Lord has to purify our desires. He has to purify us. This is a growth in poverty. We must be emptied of all our resentment, anger, and expectations of those we love.

What does it mean to desire solely the Cross? It means that I love my dysfunctional mother and father, husband or wife, child, grandmother or grandfather... so much that I am willing to receive their disorders and their oppressions and suffer it in Christ, solely for the salvation of their souls. I asked this woman, “Do you realize, my sister, that God moved you close to your parents so you can aid in the salvation of their souls?” This doesn’t necessarily mean you need to live nearby; you can be in different states, regardless of where you are; they are still your parents, and you still have to deal with them. To love does not mean you become a doormat. To love and to desire the Cross also requires knowing how to set boundaries. That means you can say “no” but always with respect and honor. We see how the Lord, who is all love, often confronted the darkness and oppression in the Pharisees with the truth. That is love.

In the second reflection of our 2020 retreat, we focused on our desires, chapter four of the Simple Path. It states that the *purification of your desires is the first stage of purification in My Sacred Heart. You begin to move only according to My desires and not yours.* (Simple Path #63, p.187). This is completely associated with growth in the virtue of poverty. You no longer do what you want to do. I may want to buy another pair of shoes. That is the desire of the flesh, yet I know that’s not the will of the Lord, so I am willing to deny myself to live in His will. The Lord, in chapter 4 of The Path, brings us to a deeper understanding of the virtue of poverty in

connection to the purification of the first nail— our desires. They go hand in hand. As the Lord tells us, *You no longer do what you want to do nor go where you want to go, but now, you only go where I take you. You choose to live each day according to what is most difficult, not what is easiest. This will require greater discipline of your will, greater silence, and stillness of soul in Me.* (Simple Path, #63).

Assignment:

1. As honest as you can be, write down the desires of your heart.
2. Meditate every day on Chapter 12 of Luke. Meditate it slowly, going deep into the virtue of poverty.
3. Use our “Examination of Conscience of Love” to prepare and enter your hearts. The examination can be found on the website under the " community " heading and then under “prayers.” It is a powerful examination of conscience. Ponder and remain with each question for some time, allowing yourself to enter its depth. Our brother Hector once told me how powerful the examination was for him. He said he had encountered one question in his examination of conscience, and the Lord had him for weeks on this one question!