



International Solidarity Reflection

Social Justice

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Introduction

According to the final document of Aparecida (Fifth General Conference of the Episcopate of Latin America and the Caribbean) the preferential option for the poor is implicit in the Christological faith. Christians as disciples and missionaries are called to contemplate in the faces of our brothers and sisters the face of Christ who calls us to serve them. "The suffering faces of the poor are the suffering faces of Christ." In other words, this is an immediate consequence of our personal encounter with Jesus that motivates our missionary discipleship. (*Aparecida Document No. 393*)

Call to Prayer

This preferential option for the poor is vital to our *Call to Solidarity*. At this time in which the benefits of globalization are not global and the effect on developing countries has been in most cases devastating, many are left behind and lack access to the basic necessities of life. "We invite the congregation to recognize that this new moment for our societies is a new moment for our mission." ("The New Moment" Document)

Experience

Melania Pinedo is a single 40-year-old mother who appears to be 60. She has three young children and earns a living selling candy in the street. One son suffers from a condition called achondroplasia (a genetic bone disease). She carries him on her back the whole time that she is in the street selling. She tires but continues because she has to pay the electricity and water and feed her children. Just like Melania, millions of poor around the world struggle every day just to survive.

World Bank statistics show that of the 6.237 billion people who populate the earth, 1.1 billion live on less than a dollar a day and cannot cover their basic needs. Never before has there been available to humanity such an abundance of wealth, resources and economic power. However, more than 1 billion people still go to bed hungry every night! These statistics show that the great problem of poverty does not stem from the lack of possibilities but of inequitable distribution of wealth on the global level.

This is the People of God! "Hear their cry for bread for their families, education for their children, for basic hygiene and for clean water. They ask for no more than a decent job and a living wage. They only seek justice and dignity, human rights and human love." (*The Cries of the People of God*)

Reflection

Within this broad concern for human dignity lies our anguish for the millions of poor who cannot lead a life corresponding to that dignity. Pope John Paul II, addressing the Latin

American countries, said: "For the Christians living in America to convert to the gospel means to revise all areas and aspects of their lives, especially all that pertains to the social order and to achieving the common good." (*Aparecida Document* No. 391)

The preferential option for the poor impels us as disciples and missionaries to seek new and creative ways to respond to other effects of poverty. The precarious situation and family violence often force many children to seek financial resources in the street to meet their own survival and that of their families, which also exposes them to serious moral and human risks. (*Aparecida Document* No. 409)

In *Vita Consecrata*, Pope John Paul II proposed the prophet Elijah, the bold prophet and friend of God, as a model for religious life. "He lived in God's presence and silently contemplated his passing, interceded for the people, boldly proclaimed his determination to defend the rights of God and also stood in defense of the poor against the powerful of this world." (No. 84, cf. 1 Kings 18-19) Does Elijah's attitude echo in my life? In what way?

Action

- How do we respond to the poor around us, taking into account that we are called to "risk everything"?
- How are our lifestyles in reference to solidarity with the poor? Do I know the difference between the desire and the need to acquire things, or just to consume?
- What are the other effects of poverty that call my attention?
- Read the recent documents of the bishops of your own country. Do they reflect the same concern for justice and solidarity with the poor?
- Where is your government in terms of taking concrete actions in favor of the neediest?
- Is there a group in your community with whom you can gather to reflect on this subject?

Closing Prayer

Lord, it looks lovely, but it certainly is not easy to become bread. It means that we can possess nothing – neither things, nor time, nor talents, nor freedom, nor health, as something exclusive: all that you have is not only yours, it belongs "to" and is "for" others. It means that we must always live with greater love, capable of dying in order to give life, as bread does.

Lord, let us be ground by those at our side who suffer; let us be kneaded by work and service in favor of justice; let us be baked by the passionate desire to live a profound solidarity that is not conditioned and demands nothing, which simply listens to the cry of the needy and gives itself as bread does.

Lord, let us be baked by the fire of the Spirit so that we are always willing to give our lives as bread that is "blessed, broken and shared for the life of the world".

Closing Hymn: a song about justice, solidarity, or God's Reign.