

A VOICE FOR THE VOICELESS



Pope Francis has been a fountain of quotes. There's one quote that particularly spoke to me and I've been using a piece of it frequently: We are called to give "voice to the cry of the poor." (The full quote is "Among our tasks as witnesses to the love of Christ is that of giving a voice to the cry of the poor, so that they are not abandoned to the laws of an economy that seems at times to treat people as mere consumers.")

We are called to be a voice for the voiceless.

The Responsorial Psalm tells us what we already know but profit from hearing again and again: "The Lord hears the cry of the poor. When the just cry out, the Lord hears them."

Yes, the Lord hears the cry of the poor and the just but this does not absolve us from our responsibilities because there is someone else (even God) who will take care of the matter. The psalmist advises us that Catholics have an obligation to meet our responsibilities to one another, to our families, and to the larger society.

Sirach reminds us that "the one who serves God willingly is heard; his petition reaches the heavens." When we willing servants of God pray often and fervently, the Lord answers our prayers. Most often our prayers are answered in ways that baffle us. God answers prayers in ways different from the expectations of us humans. (I once prayed months on end for a recovery from a serious groin injury. Every morning I would jump out of bed expecting that I was healed. Every morning I doubled over in pain. *Twenty-five years later* I finally realized that God had answered my prayers in God's way, not mine.)

When the Lord hears the cries of the poor and the just, and listens to their prayers, isn't it likely that the answer to *their* prayers is *our* voice for the voiceless?

In Jesus's parable a Pharisee thanks God that he was "not like the rest of humanity – greedy, dishonest, adulterous – or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, and I pay tithes on my whole income."

Is the Pharisee serving God willingly or is he serving his ego? The moral of Jesus's parable is "whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted."

The term "humble" – having a modest view of one's importance – is related to the Latin word "humus," the dark organic material in soils, produced by decomposing matter. "Humble" may be translated as "grounded."

Pope Francis explained that he chose his name to honor Saint Francis because "Francis was a man of peace, a man of poverty, a man who loved and protected creation."

St. Francis was humble, shunning the affluent trappings of ego and immodesty. St. Francis was, as "a man who loved and protected creation," a man of the earth.

To his explanation Pope Francis added, "How I would love a Church that is poor and for the poor." A Church that is for the poor is one where all of us (and together we are the Church) are voices for the voiceless. A veritable choir calling for justice.

(Readings for 30th Sunday of Ordinary Time)



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