For Personal Reflection

?

1. How do I feel about my time, talents and treasure?
2. How grateful to God for what I possess?
3. How generous am I with what I possess?
4. How can I give to the poor?
5. How can I be with the poor?
6. How do I deal with my own poverty? How do I deal with want, disappointment or the experience of having to do without?
7. How might I need to have a more positive view or attitude about poverty and the folks effected by it?

Further Reading

St. Francis de Sales, Introduction to the Devout Life. Part III, Chapter 15. Various editions.

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WILMINGTON–PHILADELPHIA
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Visit us on the Internet:

www.oblates.org/dss

Email us:

dss@oblates.org

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Serving...

SALESIAN PERSPECTIVES

The Poor

While Jesus preached the Good News of God's Kingdom to everyone, he had a particular place in his heart for the poor.

How can we, the brothers and sisters of Jesus, serve the poor in our own day and age? St. Francis de Sales devotes an entire chapter to this challenge in his Introduction to the Devout Life (III, Chapter 15)

"It is not enough to give to the poor. We must also live among them..."

Serving the needs of the poor must be rooted in a fundamental truth: our time, talents and treasures do not belong to us. Rather, they are gifts from God. "Our possessions are not our own," observed Francis. "God has given them to us to cultivate, and he wants us to make them fruitful and profitable." Not just for ourselves, but for others as well.

Giving alms. Might be an old expression, but the practice is no less important or powerful today. "Frequently give up some of your property by giving it with a generous heart to the poor. To give away what we have is to impoverish ourselves in proportion as we give, and the more we give the poorer we become...Nothing makes us so prosperous in this world as to give alms." (*Ibid*)

Giving to the poor something of what we have helps not only the poor, but, if given generously, it also helps us. Giving to the poor makes us more appreciative of what we have, makes us more grateful to God for being so generous to us and makes us more willing to share our God-given good fortune(s) with others.

It is not enough, however, to merely give to the poor: we must also learn, live and love among them…sometimes up close, and personal. "Go and wait on them when they are sick in bed, wait on them, I say, with your own hands. Prepare their food for them yourself and at your own expense...Such service is more glorious than that of a king." (*Ibid*)

There are countless opportunities for us to personally engage folks less fortunate than ourselves: visiting and/or volunteering at nursing homes, hospitals, rehab centers, prisons, homeless shelters, soup kitchens...the list goes on and on. To what can you commit? Once a week, twice a month, once a month? What will enable you to do justice to others while doing justice at home?

"No matter how well-off we may be, we, too, sometimes must do without…"

Francis de Sales likewise challenges us to name—and embrace—our own poverty. What, me, poor? What is Francis talking about? "There is no one who at some time or other has not felt the lack and want of some convenience. It sometimes happens that we are visited by a guest but at the time lack the time or means to receive them. At other times our best clothes are in one place but we need them in another. Sometimes the wines in our cellars ferment and turn sour, so that only bad or green wines are left. At other times we may be traveling and must stay in some hovel where everything is lacking. In short, it is often very easy to lack something, no matter how wealthy we may be. This is to be poor in effect with regard to the things we lack. Rejoice on such occasions, accept them with a good heart and endure with them cheerfully." (*Ibid*)

"How can we meet the needs of the poor in our own day?"

It would seem that there is much more to serving the poor than meets the eye. Serving the poor requires a change of heart about our own wealth: we must see it as coming from the generous hands of God, and therefore, it is meant to be shared with others.

While we must find occasions to give to the poor, it is also important to make opportunities to live with the poor: to walk in their world, to welcome them into ours.

Finally, no matter how wealthy or well-off we may be, we, too, sometimes experience poverty: things don't always go our way; sometimes, we have to do without.

In all this, whether in serving the poor in others, or embracing the poor in ourselves, we must do so as frequently as we can with generosity — and happiness — of heart.