

# **When Did I See You Hungry?**

Oscar Romero, the martyred archbishop of El Salvador, said: "We learn to see the face of Christ -the face of Christ that is also the face of a suffering human being, the face of the crucified, the face of the poor, the face of the saint, & the face of every person & we love each one with the criteria with which we will be judged: 'I was hungry& you gave me to eat.'"

Two-thirds of humanity lives in crippling poverty.

In slums in India, Kenya, Jamaica, Brazil, the Philippines, Mexico and the United States, misery is the daily bread.

The bloated belly of poverty knows no relief.

300 million people subsist on less than 65 cents a day.

Hunger has no borders;-nor does it discriminate.

In America 700,000 people are without shelter on any given night.

In Africa, 15% of the children die before the age of five

The swelling ranks of the poor and the marginalized should scandalize all of humanity.

In the United States, one in ten households live with hunger. In those homes, 36 million people, including 12 million children, are forced to skip meals or eat less to make ends meet.

Globally, about 800 million people do not have access to adequate food and nutrition. Of those, 200 million are children.

More than a billion people do not have access to clean water

Unclean water and associated poor sanitation kills over 12 million people each year.

More than 2 billion people have no sanitary means for excreta disposal.

Half of humanity - nearly 3 billion people - must survive on the equivalent of two dollars a day, or less. Half of that half lives on less than one dollar a day.

More 40 million people a year die of preventable disease or malnutrition.

Shockingly, 12 million of them are children under the age of five.

And half of those children - some six million kids -will die of illnesses that are directly or indirectly attributable to malnutrition.

Every minute of every day twenty children die of hunger or diseases related to hunger.

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At its root, there is only one reason for the existence of poverty: selfishness --which is a manifestation of a lack of authentic love.

Both the New and the Old Testament reveal God's preferential love for those the world ignores and rejects.

We are all brothers and sisters, and to set yourself up as higher or better than others is a subtle form of blasphemy. We are all connected. If one among us is diminished, we are all diminished.

The seduction of property blinds us to the needs of the poor.

Our greatest violation of poverty is to hold the good God gives - goodness has to flow.

"We do not detach ourselves from things in order to attach ourselves to God,

but rather we become detached from ourselves in order to see and use all things in and for God." - *Thomas Merton*

Justice requires that people have a place to sleep, enough food to eat, and work that makes them feel worthwhile.

The richest 20% of the world's population consumes 85% of all goods and services. The poorest 20% of the world's population consumes 1 % of all goods and services.

Consuming more than we need is stealing from those in need.

The essence of Christ's message is: make every stranger, no matter how poor or dirty, no matter how weak or unlovable, your neighbor.

St. Gregory the Great said: "When we attend to the needs of those in want, we give them what is theirs, not ours. More than performing works of mercy, we are paying a debt of justice."

"We do not fully welcome Christ if we are not ready to welcome the poor person with whom He identified Himself." -  
*Raniero Cantalamessa, OF.*

In our encounters with the poor we must move from pity to love, from charity to justice.

As long as we enjoy comfort and require security, it will be impossible to have true compassion for the poor and the weak.

Dorothy Day said: "Once we begin not to worry about what kind of a house we are living in, what kind of clothes we are wearing, we have time, which is priceless, to remember that we are our brother's keeper, and that we must not only care for his needs as far as we are immediately able, but try to build a bridge to a better world"

The Gospel compels us to unite with the poor in their struggle against poverty.

To learn the causes of poverty, we must spend time with the poor. If we share in their struggles, we can share in their liberation.

Exposure to those saddled with dire poverty uncovers our clinging selfishness.

Mother Teresa said: We should not serve the poor like they are Jesus. We should serve the poor because they are Jesus.

"You will have found Christ when you are concerned with other people's sufferings and not your own." -*F. O'Connor*

We must all work to create a society that is founded on welcome and respect, embracing the most vulnerable among us.

We need each other. None of us is truly rich. And sooner or later, each of us suffers from ignoring the other.

It is our mutual privilege to give to one another.

Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "Life's most urgent question is, what are we doing for others?"

"The deepest wisdom man can attain is to know that his destiny is to aid and serve." -*Abraham Joshua Heschl*

Compassion is far removed from pity and sympathy. Compassion grows out of an awareness of our common humanity.

Christ understood that compassion had to be far more than a feeling. For Christ, compassion was never separated from action.

Compassion is a wounding of the heart which love extends to all without distinction.

Thick Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Buddhist monk, said:

"If you have compassion, you cannot be rich. You can be rich only when you can bear the sight of suffering."

Giving a few dollars to the poor is not the same as being one with the poor, which is what Christ requires.

"In the economy of divine charity we have only as much as we give. But we are called upon to give as much as we have, and more: as much as we are." - *Thomas Merton*

Martin Luther King, Jr. said: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality tied in a single garment of destiny."

All humanity is a Single Person.

Catherine de Hueck Doherty said: "I cannot pray if I don't serve my brother. I cannot pray to the God who incarnated himself when my brother is in need. It is an impossibility. It would be like the priest, the Levite, who passed the man beset by robbers, and that one cannot do."

St. Francis of Assisi said, "We have been called to heal wounds, to bring together what has fallen apart, and to bring home those who have lost their way."

Thomas Merton, a Trappist monk, said, "If we believe in the Incarnation of the Son of God, there should be no one on earth in whom we are not prepared to see, in mystery, the presence of Christ."

Jean Vanier said, "When I walk with Jesus, He always leads me to the poorest, the lowliest and the lost; so that I may open my heart to them."

Every act of mercy and kindness brings us closer to the reality of God.

We are all poor. We are all completely dependent upon God. But our money, power or social status can blind us to the reality of how poor we are, and how much we need God's love and mercy.

It was a leper who helped St. Francis of Assisi enter into his own inner pain, and helped him open his heart more fully to God, and more fully to the poor.

Jesus showed us how to love, how to love unconditionally and without limits. And according to Christ, how we love the hungry, the lowly, and the lost, is how we love Him.

The best way to love God is to relieve the pain and suffering of others.

To forget the poor, is to forget God. Jesus made care for the poor a litmus test for our love of God.

The increased vulnerability of the already vulnerable is alarming and dramatically increases our need to stand with the poor.

We have the means to feed everyone on earth. We do not have the will to do it. This is a tremendous evil.

The poor are among us. Millions upon millions of them. They are hungry and naked. We need to feed and clothe them.

And when we do, we are feeding and clothing Jesus... and ourselves.