



The Word...

“The LORD is a God of justice, who knows no favorites.
Though not unduly partial toward the weak,
yet he hears the cry of the oppressed. The Lord is not deaf to the wail of the orphan,
nor to the widow when she pours out her complaint.
The one who serves God willingly is heard; his petition reaches the heavens.
The prayer of the lowly pierces the clouds; it does not rest till it reaches its goal,
nor will it withdraw till the Most High responds, judges justly,
and affirms the right, and the Lord will not delay”
(Sir 35:12-14, 16-18).

“The Lord hears the cry of the poor”
(Ps 34).

Pondering the Word ...

On October 4, Pope Leo XIV issued his first Papal Exhortation on love for the poor, finishing a work Pope Francis had begun before his death: https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/apost_exhortations/documents/20251004-dilexi-te.html. He explains the Catholic Social Teaching tenet, God’s preferential option for the poor, expressed today in Sirach. He focuses Chapter 3 on the Church’s history with regard to care for the poor (directed mostly to Christians), but like his predecessor, Pope Leo’s words are intended for all people of goodwill. I recommend everyone read it and take it to heart.

I am pleased he articulates something that has puzzled me no end: *“I often wonder, even though the teaching of Sacred Scripture is so clear about the poor, why many people continue to think that they can safely disregard the poor”* (§ 23). I’ve even had someone say to me once that it appears God doesn’t really listen to the cry of the poor; if God did, why is there still so much poverty in the world? (This individual continued that it must be the fault of the poor themselves. Not much renders me speechless, but....)

I also appreciate his focus on different types of poverty: *“In fact, there are many forms of poverty: the poverty of those who lack material means of subsistence, the poverty of those who are socially marginalized and lack the means to give voice to their dignity and abilities, moral and spiritual poverty, cultural poverty, the poverty of those who find themselves in a condition of personal or social weakness or fragility, the poverty of those who have no rights, no space, no freedom”* (§ 9). This challenges us to expand our thinking beyond material poverty, to extend love to those marginalized, excluded, and have no voice because of their age, illness, race, religion, ethnicity, living situations, immigration status, gender and sexual identities, etc. Leo’s penultimate sentence, for me, captures the call: *“A Church that sets no limits to love, that knows no enemies to fight but only men and women to love, is the Church that the world needs today”* (§ 120). Amen.

Living the Word...

Read this exhortation, not just as words, not just as history, but as prayer. In fact, if you read just two paragraphs a day, starting with chapter one, it will take you right up to Christmas! Read it as *Lectio Divina*: what words, phrases, images, or concepts speak to you? How do Pope Leo’s words challenge you to change your view of the poor and inspire you to reach out and speak out for justice? Let the Spirit lead you.

Personal Reflections and Ideas ...

Mon, Oct 27: *Blessed day by day be the Lord, who bears our burdens*" (Ps 68). **Provision: Let God bear your burdens.** I say God does just that, but do I really act like I believe it? Billions of people have burdens far more onerous than I will ever have. It embarrasses me to pray about some trivial thing that matters to me. But the power of God—love—has no limits. Love is never rationed or divided; it only multiplies. Don't hesitate to bring your problems to prayer, no matter how inconsequential they may seem. (Pay attention, though, to our reflection this Wednesday.) Love can lighten any burden you bear.

Tue, Oct 28: *Jesus spent the night in prayer. When day came, he called his disciples and from them he chose Twelve, whom he also named Apostles... Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor* (Lk 6:12-16). Judas "became" a traitor. In other words, he didn't set out to betray Jesus. Scholars suggest Judas was one of Jesus' most ardent followers. It was his expectation of and commitment to the worldly kingdom of Israel that led to his downfall. In his gorgeous book, *Jesus the Son of Man*, the late poet and philosopher, Kahlil Gibran, writes of Judas and Jesus: "*One man longed for a kingdom in which he was to be a prince. Another man desired a kingdom in which all shall be princes.*"

Provision: What are your expectations? I shudder to see the nationalist movements occurring all over the world, particularly in the US, with its focus on Christian nationalism. To me, that's a contradiction in terms. The Kingdom of God knows no boundaries, no nations, no principalities. Yet, each of us risks betraying Jesus by putting our own expectations, our own will before that of God's. And God's will is love, "no exceptions." Consider: Is your commitment to the Kingdom of God or the kingdom of (fill in the blank)?

Wed, Oct 29: *"We know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to God's purpose"* (Rom 8:26-30). I've had conversations recently with people who are discouraged, even bitter, because their prayers for healing, for resolution have not come to pass. **Provision: Pray God's will be done.** When praying for an intention, consider praying as Jesus did at Gethsemane: *If it be your will, God, take this cup away* (grant my intention), *but your will, not mine, be done.* To be called according to God's purpose is to live according to God's will. Faith allows us to look beyond our circumstances to know all things work for good.

Thu, Oct 30: *"I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Rom 8:31-39). There are totalitarian governments that repress any practice of religion. Other countries turn a blind eye to religious persecution occurring both within and outside their borders. There are religions that exclude from full participation, members who don't meet certain criteria. If you are among those repressed, persecuted, or excluded, take comfort in Paul's words. No government...no religious institution...no one...nothing... can separate you from the love of God. No one. Except, of course, yourself. **Provision: Don't let the bullies and nay-sayers keep you away.** Who would Jesus turn away? Who would he not welcome at his table? I can't think of anyone Jesus would disinvite. So, what then gives us the right to say who is welcome and who is not? This is hubris. The love of God abounds and is available to all. Say yes to God's love.

Fri, Oct 31: *Jesus went to dine at the home of one of the leading Pharisees, and the people there were observing him carefully* (Lk 14: 1-6). When we hear the people are "observing Jesus carefully," we might assume they are on the look-out for something Jesus would say or do that they could accuse him: "Aha! We've caught you!" But maybe not. Some scholars suggest the Pharisees gathered may have been interested in listening to what he had to say. **Provision: Observe Jesus carefully. Listen to what he has to say.** When you read the gospels stories, don't assume you know what's going on. Don't play back the tapes of sermons from years ago. Really listen to Jesus' words. Observe what he does. What lessons lie in the story for you?

Sat, Nov 1: *"Blessed are the poor, they who mourn, the meek..."* (Mt 5:1-12). I mentioned I am happy to hear Pope Leo also wonders why our perspective on the poor, the oppressed, and the suffering hasn't changed over the millennia. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament are so clear; why then do we still view the rich and powerful as the ones blessed, the ones to be honored? Why do we still see the poor, the meek, the suffering as weak or even punished by God!? **Provision: What is your opinion?** When you are mourning, do you feel divine bliss (the actual Greek word)? When you are peaceful in the face of oppression or violence, do you feel blessed? How do you view those who are meek or who offer mercy? What do Jesus' Beatitudes say to you?