

25th Sunday Ordinary Time
September 19, 2010
Fr. Tom Elliott

“God Lifts Up the Poor

Amos 8:4-7
Psalm 113
1 Timothy 2:1-8
Luke 16:1-13

Haiti is considered the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere. The unemployment rate is over 80%. More than half of Haitians live on less than a dollar a day. There are few paved roads, an inadequate supply of drinkable water, and minimal utilities. Less than 20% of Haitians age 15 and over can read and write. Around 40% of the Haitian population doesn't have access to primary health care. The United Nations estimates that 1 out of every 8 children in Haiti die before the age of five. And, as in all impoverished nations, corruption is rampant and contributes greatly to the perpetuation of poverty.

In our first reading today from the prophet Amos, God challenged His people to put an end to the political and economic corruption that perpetuates poverty. God was aware of how the political and financial leaders of the people were constantly plotting to cheat the poor and take advantage of them. God lets them know, through the prophet Amos, that He has heard their thoughts and plotting. God says, “Hear this, you who trample upon the needy and destroy the poor of the land!” (Amos 8:4). Then He quotes their thoughts—

“When will the new moon be over,” you ask, “that we may sell our grain, and the sabbath, that we may display the wheat? We will diminish the ephah, add to the shekel, and fix our scales for cheating! We will buy the lowly man for silver, and the poor man for a pair of sandals; even the refuse of the wheat we will sell!” The LORD has sworn by the pride of Jacob: Never will I forget a thing they have done!

-Amos 8:5-7

Social justice is one of the main themes of Amos' preaching. There was a tremendous amount of extortion and cheating going on in the marketplaces, which kept the poor farmers from getting a fair price for their grain (Amos 5:11; 8:4-6). Some of the other abuses occurring at that time included the upper class oppressing the poor through sexual abuse of servants (Amos 2:7) and debt slavery of the poor (Amos 8:6). Amos did not hesitate to boldly speak out against these abuses, even when it meant criticizing those in political power—the king, the high priest, and the wealthy.

Amos' preaching now extends through the centuries to us here today, revealing the voice of God as He reminds us that **the poor are precious to Him** and that **we have an obligation and responsibility to use our resources in a way that blesses them and reminds them of their dignity!** In the words of our Psalm today, our God is a God of justice, who “lifts up the poor” (Psalm 113:7). He does this primarily through the generosity, courage, and compassion that He stirs up in His people, His stewards.

God has made us stewards of the earth and entrusted to us the wealth of the world, not for our own gain, but that we might use what we've been given in order to bless other people and participate in His justice and compassion. Jesus made it clear that the goal of our generosity is not to create some sort of utopia where poverty doesn't exist; no, Jesus said, "The poor you will always have with you," (Matthew 26:11a), but rather, **we are to use our resources in a way that blesses the poor, reminds them of their inherent dignity, and draws us deeper into experiencing the Beatitude, "Blessed are you who are poor, for the kingdom of God is yours"** (Luke 6:20b).

Last year, through the initiative of Mary Francis Roebuck, our Youth Group did a service project for poor children in Haiti. The project consisted of filling bags with particular items, including toiletries, treats, and gifts. These bags were then given to poor children in Haiti for Christmas so that they might be blessed and reminded of their inherent dignity. For many of them, it was the only thing they received for Christmas.

A couple of months ago, I met with Mary Francis, Carole Hargrave, the head of our Social Concerns Committee, and Jennifer Briselden, our Youth Director, and we decided to make this service project a parish-wide effort. Our goal is to provide joy for 500 poor children in Haiti this Christmas! It will require very little from us—an almost embarrassingly small effort—yet, it will mean a lot to those children.

Bags have been prepared and will be available after Mass at all of the exits of the church. The bags include a very specific list of things to purchase and put in the bag. We invite all of you to take as many bags as you want, and to fill them with the things specified on the list, and return them to Mass in the next two weekends. Here is the most important thing to remember about the list of "ingredients" for the bag—do NOT stray from the specifics on the list. Our shipping costs for mailing these bags to Haiti, as well as the size of the shipping boxes, have already been calculated based on everyone putting in the bags *only what the lists request*.

As we work together as a parish on this service project, I pray that it will remind us of God's words of justice, stewardship, and love for the poor spoken through our Scripture readings today!

SUGGESTED PRAYER EXERCISES:

- ✚ Read Luke 6:20. What does this beatitude mean to you personally? How do you experience it in your own life?
- ✚ Prayerfully recall one time when you felt a tremendous compassion for the poor. What feelings did it stir up in you? What did it seem like God was communicating to you? What was your response?