





The Thirteenth Sunday of the Year


2 Corinthians 8:7, 9, 13-15




Drawing its inspiration from Scripture, the Church's social teaching, and the experiences and hopes of the poor - those who are deprived, marginalized, or in any way oppressed, CAFOD looks forward to a world in which


-  the good things of creation are cherished, developed and shared by all
-  the rights and dignity of each person are respected, discrimination is ended and all are gathered into a single human family from which no-one is excluded
-  the voice of the poor is heard and heeded by all, and lives are no longer dominated by greed
-  all have access to food, shelter and clean water; to a livelihood, health and education.


Today's second reading is one piece of Scripture that inspired the creation of CAFOD and continues to maintain its vision of the way things ought to be. The reading from the Book of Wisdom about the nature of death and the reading from the Gospel about Jesus saving two lives enfold Paul's thought. Death is an evil, which Jesus fought against and overcame. The Christian community has to have the same attitude and behave in the same way as Jesus.

 The Christians of Jerusalem had expected Jesus to return very quickly and bring heaven to earth. They prepared for the end by selling their goods and giving to the poor but in their enthusiasm they impoverished themselves. There was also a contradiction between the natural Jewish belief, based on a long history, that the Chosen Few would be saved and the belief that Jesus was for everybody and that the Good News was that the world was saved.

The missionary journeys of Peter, Paul, Barnabas, Mark, Thomas and Philip were all based on this second belief and time proved them right. Meanwhile, the first generation of Christians in Jerusalem were suffering the twin hardships of famine and persecution. Something had to be done. Paul made it a priority of his teaching that the Christian community should support those in need.

 Paul had at least two motives for helping the suffering Church in Jerusalem. His first motive was simply to relieve suffering. His second motive showed a greater vision. The Gentile Church was largely made up of people with businesses, large and small. Many converts, especially in Corinth, were quite wealthy. If they would help the Church in Jerusalem, the natural suspicion that existed between Jewish and Gentile Christians would be laid to rest and the Church would become a more unified whole. Paul put this nicely in his letter to the Romans – “if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews’ spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings.” (Rom. 15:27)

 It might seem that Paul's letters are full of theory and theology and they are. But the letters are his response to questions arising out of the growing faith and actions of the Church in its early years. Paul was a man of action; he did not sit in an office firing off letters every day. His main interest was to spread the Good News that a new world was being created which would be free of sin and death. The result of receiving the Good News was faith in action. His priorities can be seen clearly in the way he sums up the whole Gospel of Jesus, the Son of God, becoming man and redeeming the world, in a throwaway sentence – “he was rich, but he became poor for your sake, to make you rich out of his poverty.” (2 Cor. 8:9) The stress is all on action.

 After the appeal to the example of Jesus' life, Paul appeals to the story of the Hebrews in the desert gathering manna - “Those who gathered much had none too much; those who gathered little did not go short.” (Exodus 16:18) This equality, originally created on the small stage of the Church in Jerusalem, and then on the larger stage of the world of Paul's missionary activity, is played out in the whole world today.