

HOW SHOULD WE HANDLE OUR WEALTH? SEEING THE POOR

How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?

1 JOHN 3:17

We are the rich. We *do* have “the world's goods.” We are trying hard not to want even more of those goods.

But do we see our “brother or sister in need”? We do. Television news programs have shown us the world's dingy famine-ridden areas. We have seen skinny mothers holding their spindly infants. We have seen the little kids with their sad faces and slow ways – kids with legs you could circle with thumb and forefinger. Even in rich countries like the United States and Canada, some household pets eat better than some people. Retirees on fixed incomes, forced to economize in the only flexible part of their budget, do without meat and then without milk. In large cities, the homeless shop in restaurant garbage bins. We see them.

And yet, in another way, we do not. We don't *really* see them – not with enough compassion and indignation to do something about it. We don't want to see human need that way. It's unpleasant. And perhaps we're secretly afraid that too much indignation over financial inequality might develop into full-fledged economic reform. Reluctantly, but deliberately we “refuse help” for the poor. Like Lazarus at the rich man's door, the poor become once more merely a part of the landscape. They may have all the crumbs they like, just so they make themselves scarce.

How do we refuse help? Few of us have the heart to say that the poor *deserve* their misery – that the reason for the awkward difference between them and us is that they are bad and we are good, that they are lazy and corrupt while we are diligent and upright. We don't dare say any of that because we know that's not what the Bible teaches. The Bible sternly warns the rich and seeks to protect and promote the interests of the poor.

No, we refuse help in other ways. We *all* do. We say the problem of poverty is too big, too remote, too complex, too disturbing. Besides, none of our close friends are poor. And so we go on, feeling guilty at times, but essentially unchanged.

We may be in deadly trouble. “How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?”

Dear Lord, we have to admit our sins of omission. We have passed by on the other side. We have tried not to see human misery. Forgive us, we pray. Kindle in us a light of compassion and a will to do what we know in our hearts is right and just. Move us out of the grayness of guilt to a new day of excitement and hard work in doing whatever we can for our neighbor's good. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Prayers and Meditations – Seeing the Poor

O God, to us whose vision of the poverty-turned-riches of your son's nativity has inspired an intense concern for the poor and needy, grant us also to look into the homes of the poor of the world, to share their hopes, their sayings, their customs, their hospitality, and to recognize that we are enriched by their wisdom and knowledge and by the beauty of their lives.

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O Lord God, who has granted to men in our time an even larger empire over the material world, have mercy upon our affluence and upon our poverty, upon our pride and upon our shame.

Grant to our generation to learn the hallowing of science by the poetry of worship that we may be saved from the menace in our own competence.

Is the climax of our technology to be the dark valley of our despair? Centuries of toil have reached for the wealth we now attain.

Is it to be the easy plenty of the few amid the harsh privation of the many, a world of scientific neighbourhood across a chasm of inequality? Shall the promise of leisure be only a more wearisome curse and the long dream of a proven illusion?

Let the humanity that masters nature become the servant of thy praise, whose alone and always and the power and the dominion and the glory. Amen.

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*Lord, you place me in the world
To be its light.
I was afraid of the shadows,
Afraid of the poverty.
I did not want to know other people.
And my light slowly faded away.
Forgive me, Jesus. (Uruguay)*

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Do not let the Church close its eyes, O Lord, to the plight of the poor and neglected, the homeless and destitute, the old and the sick, the lonely and those who have none to care for them. Give us the vision and compassion to labour tirelessly to heal those who are broken in body or spirit, and to turn their sorrow into joy' through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.



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