

In comparison to the rest of the world, any place, at any point in history we are a people who have been richly blessed by God. The great majority of us live in relative comfort. We have food, shelter, clean water, and reliable electrical power to our homes. Even our poor are relatively well off. Except for the few who are homeless, they enjoy the benefits of our society and have the same issues with obesity as the rest of the population.

Yes, the poor are still with us, and always will be. Yes, individuals and families sometime fall through the gaps, but we have people dedicated to helping them get back on their feet.

Compare this to Cairo, Egypt. It seems that there are probably as many beggars in the Souk, that is the market, as there are shoppers and merchants. When I was there the population of the dump was estimated to be between 7,000 to 9,000 people. They survived by tunneling through the garbage looking for food and living in the holes that they dug. Everyone who has served in a third world country can tell similar stories.

We are truly blessed. But even with all of these blessings, Our Lord is speaking to us today and telling us that there is something more valuable, and more important. Something that has a greater impact on our lives than our wealth, or lack thereof. The item of great value is the kingdom of heaven. There is nothing more important in our lives than doing what is necessary to find ourselves, with the blessing of God's mercy in the kingdom of heaven. Absolutely nothing.

We have all of these wonderful blessings but we have lost the bubble, we have forgotten where they come from and where we hope to be going. The results of this loss are shown on the streets of our cities. We seem to be a people bent on destruction. A people living in fear, violence in the streets, and laws that are insults to God and the Holy Family.

The destruction in our streets is a reflection of our abandonment of the concept that each individual person is a child of God by our society. A child that is fully deserving of life, dignity, and love from conception to natural death, without exception. As individuals go, so goes the family, and as the family goes, so goes society.

Which leads us to one of my favorite Old Testament stories, what I like to call 'The Prayer of Solomon'. God offers Solomon anything, can you imagine, God writing a blank check, any one thing you want, he will give to

you? Solomon demonstrates humility and asks for an understanding heart so he can govern wisely. In other words, he asks for wisdom.

In these troubled times we need to follow Solomon's example. He approached the Lord with humility, admitting that he found himself in a situation where he was over his head and needed help. In doing this, he was living in spiritual poverty. The spiritual poverty led him to be totally dependent on God, even though he was wealthy and powerful in the eyes of the world. Because of his dependence on God, his kingdom, Israel, lived in peace, and the people were well cared for throughout his reign.

What is this spiritual poverty? It is the ability exercise humility, to die to one's self, to set the concerns, pressures and pleasures of this world to the side and become like a little child totally dependent on God. It starts with recognizing that everything we have, everything we are, and everything we ever will be is a gift from God. In it's best form it is the ability to totally set the world aside for the Kingdom.

With that description, all of the sudden spiritual poverty leapt out of reach for most, if not all of us, or did it? All the great Saints exercised spiritual poverty, but they didn't get there in a day. We need to start by exercising humility throughout our day. We need to be polite, listen, truly listen to the other person, and give thanks to God for all we have. We need to be generous; our possessions are but loans, when we pass from this life into the next we aren't taking them with us.

We need to practice dying to our selves, to trusting in God's plan instead of our plans. Maybe it starts during our prayer time, then to our family time, and eventually throughout our daily lives. This doesn't mean that we shouldn't make plans and take action; it means that God and the kingdom of heaven should be part of those plans. We need to keep in mind that while we are counting on Christ, Christ is counting on us.

Am I successful with spiritual poverty? Some days more than others. It is always a struggle, always a challenge and temptation is always trying to knock me off course. That is why the struggle for spiritual poverty is an integral part of carrying our cross.

Am I worried about what is going on in the streets of our Nation and with our laws? Should we all be worried? The answer is yes. The reason we should be worried is because all of these events are leading people, and

that includes our children, away from God, away from the kingdom of heaven as they seek to satisfy their baser instincts and pleasures.

How worried? Just enough to spur us to pay attention and respond. Two final points. First, in the beginning of the Book of Exodus we read this about the Israelites under oppression from the Pharaoh; "...the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread..." (*Ex 1;12*) The Church in the United States is being oppressed and maybe it is not a bad thing since it wakes us up to the gift we have been taking for granted for so long. Maybe, just maybe we should remind our absent friends about the gift they have been missing.

The second point. Throughout the lives of the Saints, and if I dare say it, in my life as well, every time I was or am about to do something really good, something that supports the Kingdom of God, Satan doubles down and attacks with renewed vigor because he hates to loose. As I said earlier, as goes the individual, so goes the family. As the family goes, so goes society. Why are things such a mess? Because Satan is in danger of loosing this round of the struggle.

We need to set ourselves on the road to spiritual poverty. We need to exercise humility and wisdom for the great treasure, the perfect pearl, the kingdom of heaven. And as we work toward that goal, just remember, God's got this.