

Poor in spirit

Jesus says that “blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” Mathew 5:3, there can be a number of different interpretations of this truth. I recently learned of one perspective, which I think worthwhile to share in the context of our Vincentian spirit and activities. This is the perspective projected from the parable of Luke 18:9-14 - the Pharisee and the Tax Collector praying separately in the synagogue.

The Pharisee, no doubt, has done all the right things according to his beliefs – observes all the laws and precepts. He is probably also a “charitable” person in giving alms (tithes) and is involved in acts of corporate charity like the Vincentians of today. In the parable, he prays to God by way of referencing his own good deeds, exalts himself in his own perceived righteousness over the Tax Collector who is, by all social perception, a sinner – one who works to extract taxes from his countrymen whether fairly or unfairly.

However, he recognizes his sinfulness and nothingness before God and humbles himself to repent as a sinner. The parable continues with Jesus saying that the Tax Collector is justified and the Pharisee is not.

Who then is the poor in spirit in this parable? Jesus says the one who recognizes that he is truly poor before God. No matter how good and righteous we think we are, how enlightened and charitable we are, we are totally poor before God in the sense that we are totally dependent on Him and cannot, in any way, be measured to His standard of being rich. If we recognize that all people – whether materially, intellectually or socially poor or rich, are absolutely equally poor before God, then we see our brothers and ourselves as we truly are; then we have the humility to appreciate that we are only sharing what is given us when we extend a hand to the people around us including our Vincentian friends; then we have the compassion and the joy in giving and receiving; then we can dimly see the kingdom of heaven as St. Paul says.

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