

LIVING THE INCARNATION

Reverend Hyland Fraser is a deacon who participated in a pilgrimage to the Our Lady of Guadalupe shrine in Mexico City. On one excursion to a popular market, the group noticed a couple seated on the sidewalk, begging. He happened to pass by them again on his own as the group went about shopping. This time, motivated by Pope Francis' call for us to show others the mercy of Jesus by reaching out and touching the poor, he knelt down on the street, looked them in the eye, gave them some money, and placing his hand on their heads while holding one of their hands, gave them a blessing. He then asked them to give him their blessing. They nodded, placed their hands on his head, and silently blessed him. He was profoundly moved by this encounter, humbly sharing with the group later that after seeing so many churches lined with gold plating, he had found Christ not so much there, but in this encounter with this poor couple.

Not only did Reverend Hyland live out the Great Commandment of Jesus, to love others as we love ourselves, he also lived out the deepest meaning of the season of Advent – preparing ourselves to celebrate the coming of our great creator God into his own creation by humbly becoming one of us, as a tiny, vulnerable, powerless baby.

Advent invites us to emulate Jesus, by humbly entering into the lives of others and especially the poor, respectfully, tenderly, with the attitude of a learner, and out of compassion and selfless love that focuses on the needs of the other.

The poor are always being given to. How we give to them is delicately crucial, so that it is not always just one-sided charity. Can we also be prepared to see the richness, resilience, ingenuity, caring and compassion in them, and be open to allowing them to give something to us, whatever that might be – even as small a thing as a cigarette? In that way, we can give them the gift they need the most – human dignity.

In # 121 of his recent encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis writes, “No one, then, can remain excluded because of his or her place of birth, much less because of privileges enjoyed by others who were born in lands of greater opportunity. The limits and borders of individual states cannot stand in the way of this. As it is unacceptable that some have fewer rights by virtue of being women, it is likewise unacceptable that the mere place of one’s birth or residence should result in his or her possessing fewer opportunities for a developed and dignified life.”

These words are an invitation to us to love others as Jesus has loved us, the core of our Vincentian spirituality, and central meaning of the Incarnation. As the Indigenous peoples put it, “He has pitched his tent among us.” Can we also pitch our tent in the camps of the poor, putting flesh to the unconditional love of Christ for them?

Questions for reflection:

1. How have I been blessed by the poor?
2. How have I been able to give the gift of dignity to others?
3. What one particular action can I do to enter more deeply into the spirit of Advent?

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