

Year C Oct. 24, 2010 - 30th Sunday in Ordinary Time

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This Sunday's readings are like a continuation of last Sunday's on perseverance in prayer. But there is an air of mystery surrounding the assertion that the Lord hears the cry of the poor. There are many calamities in the world today, especially war, terrorism, dictatorship, natural disasters and epidemics, and they strike the poor first and most. Even earthquakes do not hit evenly: the same or even a lesser earthquake will destroy and kill far more where houses are poorly built and emergency response is weak and unorganized. It seems the poor get the raw end of the deal each time. Is it not ironic, and perhaps even mocking, to say that "the Lord will not delay" in heeding the cry of the weakest?

Our Christian faith, in following Jesus, must see two aspects of this problem. First, that indeed God is foremost with the poor: the poor are preached the Good News, Lk 7:22; 6:20, cf. 6:24. The poor often display that detachment from material goods which is what those who aspire to holiness, even in other religions like Hinduism and Buddhism, strive for with great effort. The poor are often innocent, in that they are not the "movers and shakers" who must be responsible for the mess the world and many of its institutions are in. It is true that the belief that merely lacking funds saves you ("Ebionism") is a heresy, but the rationale for the different fates of Lazarus and the anonymous "rich man" is not so much ethical as simple reversal of roles: Abraham says "Child, remember that you received your goods in your life, and Lazarus similarly bad things; but now here he is consoled but you are anguished" (Lk 16:25). This is part of our faith.

But faith without works is dead (Jas 2:14-26). This is the other side of the mystery: why we do not "repair the world" (*tikkun 'olam*, as the Jews say) and hold close to "our things." At bottom, our attitude is like the Pharisees: we think only of ourselves, our worth (like the *L'Oreal* ads proclaim). With humility and obedience to God, like the sinner in the parable, we will be right with God ("justified"), and can go "home" at peace. Let us place ourselves in the other's shoes, and remember the biblical motif of *reversal*: the humble will be exalted, the last will be first, the greatest is servant of all.