
Lenten Poverty

An article from the *Cathedral Times*.

(Here is an excerpt from my Ash Wednesday sermon this year. The entire sermon is available [here](#) and in our hallway kiosks. –Sam Candler)

Last week, I spent some time on a retreat, in the desert. I did sleep comfortably in a hotel every night; but during each day, I traveled to a little Franciscan community, where I listened to one of the great spiritual teachers of our time.

I came away from my time with new learnings and teachings, for sure. But I also came away with renewed appreciation for the Order of the Franciscans; because the Franciscans, as most of you know, take a vow of poverty when they become a brother.

A vow of poverty. For most of us here in the United States, and maybe throughout the world, for those of us who participate deftly in the world of commerce, and of buying and selling, and trading, and acquiring and saving, and spending—for most of us, the vow of poverty is a murky and mysterious place, a region about which we have only strange images. Poverty scares many of us. Poverty is something we are taught to avoid. And an intentional vow of poverty is quite foreign to us, almost terrifying, because we simply cannot imagine not owning anything.

What would it mean not to own anything? Wow.

While most of us have spent so much of our lives trying to acquire things, my Franciscan brother has decided to own nothing. When I heard him reflect on that vow, last week, I realized, however, what a magnificent gift God has given him in that vow. He has been released. He doesn't have to enter the world of acquiring and losing.

Now, I realize he must have his problems, I am sure. Contrary to popular thought, monastics do not remain unscathed from the temptations of the world; but, at its best, his vow of poverty has released him from lots of other problems. With nothing to own, he doesn't have to worry about losing things either.

In George and Ira Gershwin's opera, *Porgy* sings about this way: *"I've Got Plenty of Nothing, and nothing's plenty for me./... Folks with plenty of plenty, got to pray all the day./Seems with plenty you sure got to worry how to keep the devil away."*

The Christian Church, by long-standing custom, has urged her members to give up something during Lent. That might mean fasting; it might mean some other behavior of self-denial. But giving up something is not meant to harm us, or to teach us some hard lesson, or to punish us. Instead, like the Franciscans, the Church knows that when we genuinely give up something, we gain some freedom from it. Giving something up is meant to free us for something else.

... Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Blessed are those who know their poverty. What are you poor in? Lent is the season to consider that question. What are you poor in? Where is your poverty?

Are you poor in money? ... J. Paul Getty was at one time reputed to be the richest man in the world, and they asked him how much was enough. He replied, "Just a little bit more." ... Are you poor in money? Give it away. Are you poor in spirit? ... Then give from that place. Yes, even if you claim you are poor in spirit, try to give some spirit away. Go up to somebody and encourage them, instead of waiting for them to encourage you. Give somebody some spirit. Are you poor in

confidence? Give somebody else some confidence. Are you poor in love? You don't think you have enough? Then give some love to someone else.

It's amazing what will happen. Jesus put it this way. The measure you give will be the measure you receive. He didn't mean it as a reward. It is a fact, a principle, a fact of life. "Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back" (Luke 6:37-38).

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sam Candler". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

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