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Staudinger

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME - JANUARY 29, 2023

There was a story in the Maryknoll Magazine some years ago about a young priest in the Philippines was assigned responsibility for a chapel that was located in a very remote, mountainous area. The first day he went there to celebrate Mass, he had to drive two hours on a narrow, dirt road. Then, since there was no road up to the chapel, he had to climb another hour through dense jungle growth. When he finally reached the chapel, he saw that only five people had shown up to Mass. He was feeling irritated that he had spent three hours of white knuckled driving and hazardous climbing to celebrate Mass for only five people. Then, one of the parishioners, an older woman, came up to him, grabbed his hands in hers, and said, "Thank you so much, Father, for coming to say Mass for us. I walked four hours to get here." Immediately, the young priest understood that it was not about how many people showed up to Mass but the faith of the people who were there. And he promised the woman that, no matter how difficult it was, he would make time to celebrate Mass there.

What makes someone walk four hours to attend a Mass that probably lasted only about an hour? It was certainly her faith, but also something more profound. This woman knew her need for God. She

understood that she was nothing without Him. And whatever sacrifice it required to be in His presence, she was willing to make it. All because she understood that she needed God, and nothing else could take His place. Can we, do the same!

When Jesus tells us in today's gospel that the poor in spirit are blessed, it is people like this woman that He's talking about - people who know their need for God.

The poor in spirit also understand how powerless and helpless they are. They are profoundly aware that the only reason they even exist is because of God's love. Whatever they have is the result of their Heavenly Father's goodness and generosity. And they help others carry their burdens as well because they know that God will never abandon them.

The poor in spirit are also humble. Because God and His love are the center of their lives, they do not need attention or praise from others. In fact, human praise and criticism mean nothing to them. They realize that only God truly knows them, so no human being has any right to praise or criticize them. sense of self is swallowed up in their relationship with God. They are God's children, and that is enough for them.

Those who are poor in spirit have only one desire - to please God in all things. They find their joy in doing God's will. They have a lively sense that God is present and active in their lives and that He will not only show them what He desires of them but give them the power to do it.

The poor in spirit may not appear to be powerful by human standards - they might be materially poor or physically frail - but that does not mean they are weak. In fact, they are the most courageous people around. Nothing scares them because they know God will provide for them?

It is just such people whom Jesus calls blessed. It is to the poor in spirit that Jesus hands over His Kingdom. Why? Because they perfectly reflect the love of God.

Like the poor in spirit, God does good to us whether we love Him or not. He provides for all of us whether we are grateful for it or whether all we do is complain that what we have is not enough. He loves us whether we seek to do His will or whether we spend all our time and energy pursuing the things of this world. He calls out to us and invites us to a personal relationship with Him whether we go to church every day or whether we have never even said an "Our Father." God's only desire is to do what is good for us, no matter how good or bad we are.

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The poor in spirit are blessed because - though God loves everyone - it is only they who are able to welcome that love into their hearts. It takes humility to enter into a relationship of love with Almighty God. When we are humble, then God can enter our lives, transform us, and use us to touch others.

Our God comes to us today in the most humble form imaginable - in a small host the Eucharist. He becomes small so that we can receive Him without fear. Let us approach Him fully aware that we need Him and fully committed to making His will the center of our lives. Then we will experience all the blessings He promises to us the poor in spirit.

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