



Third World Day of the Poor: 17 November 2019

Many years ago, while studying theology, I read a text from Saint John Chrysostom which has lodged within me ever since. The exact words, and the source, are lost to me now but the message was this: Every home should have a Christ room where a person who is poor might find food and shelter and companionship. John goes on to say that we create Christ rooms and welcome the stranger, not so that we can serve them, but so that we can be evangelized by them. John teaches that, when we allow our lives to intertwine with the lives of those who see and experience God in very different ways, we are able to broaden and deepen our own knowing of God. The *Constitutions* of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas contains a paragraph with a similar intent.

*By collaborating with others
in works of mercy,
we continually learn from them
how to be more merciful. #6*

True collaboration, true relationship, requires the development of relationships in which we mutually know one another's goals, intents and talents. It requires generous investments of time and openness to the hopes of the other.

These passages came back to me as I read [Pope Francis' message](#) in preparation for the Third World Day of the Poor. Francis has chosen as the theme for this year a verse from the psalms – "The hope of the poor will not perish forever." (Psalm 9:19) He suggests that we bear responsibility for giving hope to the poor and in paragraph 8 he writes, "Hope is also communicated by the sense of fulfillment born of accompanying the poor, not for a brief moment of enthusiasm, but through a constant commitment over time." This sentence speaks of the same kind of relationship building intended by John Chrysostom and his Christ rooms. The effect of which, Francis tells us, is that "The poor save us because they enable us to encounter the face of Jesus Christ."

The themes raised by both John and Francis find resonance in our recent Mercy conversations and language. The [Mercy International Reflection Process](#), in which we heard voices from around our Mercy world, resulted in commitments to be actively engaged in the protection of our Common Home and to stand with the displaced,

modelling a world of welcome and inclusion for the poor, the homeless, the trafficked, the refugee and the asylum seeker. These words became the basis for the [new vision statement](#) of Mercy International Association which calls upon us to gather the inspirations and energies of the Mercy family as we “strive for a globalization of compassion and a recognition of God’s mercy as present and active in our world.”

We enter into this commitment through the recently launched [Mercy Global Presence](#) process. This newly discovered understanding describes ourselves as “an organic entity and countercultural sign in a globalized world which has made more extreme the displacement of persons and the degradation of earth.” This ongoing process will help us to “unpack” our commitments and to sustain them with energy and creativity.

These three “voices” – John Chrysostom, Pope Francis and our own Mercy family urge us not only to serve persons who are living in poverty, not only to work toward the alteration of social and political and ecclesiastical systems which hold them in the bondage of poverty, but to open our hearts and, perhaps our homes, to those who are blessed because they are poor in spirit and in fact, welcoming also the wisdom they bring.

At the conclusion of the jubilee year of Mercy Mary Wickham, RSM wrote [a poem](#) to mark the sealing of the jubilee door. In part, it says:

We will not close the Door of Mercy.
There will be room at our inn,
we will make space at the table,
the cooking pot holds ample.
Through the door is feast and safety,
hope and shelter.

The World Day of the Poor invites us to prop open our doors, to enter into relationship, to assume the posture of learners, and, as Pope Francis promises, “encounter the face of Jesus Christ” in the company of those whose lives are shaped by poverty.

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