

# CONNECT! SUNDAY REFLECTION

28th Sunday in Ordinary Time | For Sunday, October 10, 2021

## **“Amazed, Astonished, Impossible ... but ...”**

*Written by Br. John Marmion Villa*

**Wisdom 7:7-11**

**Hebrews 4:12-13**

**Mark 10:17-30 or 10:17-27**



Picture yourself in the scene of today's Gospel. Many of us can resonate with the response of these disciples — 'amazed,' and 'exceedingly astonished,' or from another perspective, shocked and perplexed — because they are our very own responses today when Jesus teaches. The poverty that Jesus invites His followers into can run in direct opposition to the "self-made man" perspective of the American culture. [Cardinal Cantalamessa](#) describes four aspects of this Evangelical Poverty: material poverty as a social phenomenon to be addressed (as in combating world hunger); material poverty as an evangelical position to be embraced (as in radical frugality and simplicity of life); spiritual poverty as an evil to be fought (as in deliverance ministry); and spiritual poverty as an ideal to strive for (as in the [Little Way of St. Therese of Lisieux](#)). Evangelical poverty is the pursuit of a characteristic of the heart, a quality of our being that ennobles the effort to attain it.

We find this quality beautifully exemplified in the life of [St. Francis of Assisi](#). As his material needs decreased, so his capacity for enjoyment increased. "The poorer Francis became, the less cramped was his soul. Because he has such a zest for eliminating inessentials, his talent for enjoying life's good things grew steadily more highly sensitized." (Mother Mary Francis, "[Chastity, Poverty and Obedience: Recovering the vision for the Renewal of Religious Life](#)")

Jesus' invitation here is to embrace the upside down perspective of being his follower. We find our riches in poverty. A seemingly impossible task indeed when it is so easy to drive ourselves

down to the local store and purchase whatever it is that we need at any given moment, or we can just “Google it.” Not that Evangelical Poverty is the exclusive domain of professed religious or is providing for one’s needs out of the storehouse of their earnings a moral evil either. Somewhere in between destitution and opulence lies the balance for Jesus’ invitation to Gospel poverty.

When I was living in a Catholic household of men many years ago, we had an annual practice of “the purge.” It started on Saturday morning after praying Morning Prayer together. We would each go separately to our rooms and sort through the possessions that had accumulated in our rooms over the course of the past year. After about an hour, we would gather together, and as a group led by the household leader, we would visit each room where there would be a few garbage bags of stuff either to be donated or to be discarded. The guideline for discerning what to keep or donate/discard was this, “Keep only what you need to survive.” This was a very practical way that we kept ourselves accountable to the way of life we were trying to live out. Once we went through each guy’s room, we then went through the common areas of the house in the same manner. After lunch together, we’d pile all the plastic bags into a car, or we’d throw them in the dumpster. This annual practice was a way that we embraced Gospel poverty proper to our state of life at the time.

The “nah-uh, Jesus” response that so many of us have is indicative of the impossibility of being a follower of Jesus on our own power. That’s why Jesus gives his followers grace and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit in order to attain the lofty heights of virtue. We cannot do it on our own; our attachments to carnality, pleasures, and possessions, as well as the fickleness and frailty of our flawed character are indeed strong and difficult to surrender unless we are convinced that something greater is available worth the sacrifice. But Jesus’ offer of salvation and eternal life is available to all without hesitation or reserve ... how shall we respond today?

Br. John Marmion Villa

## PRAYER

“Lord, thou hast won, at length I yield;  
My heart, by mighty grace compell’d,  
Surrenders all to thee;  
Against thy terrors long I strove,  
But who can stand against thy love?  
Love conquers even me.”

([Lyrics by John Newton, 1779](#) )