

The Call to Holiness: Love the Poor

Father Dan Leary — 2023-12-07

Fr. Dan challenged us in this talk to embrace the poor, and in so doing, to embrace our own poverty. He spoke of some of his experiences at Chalco's World Villages for Children's Girlstown. During the pandemic, the decision was made to not close down the Girlstown boarding school and send the children home. Since there were no guests or visitors to focus on and take up the children's time, there was plenty of additional time for Adoration and Mass. Fr. Dan decided to double down on Eucharistic love. The girls were given the option to either go running or go to optional Mass after their long school day. They enthusiastically chose Mass. They learn to run and to swim not only for healthy exercise, but to escape from situations that could be traumatic. Father offered optional daily Masses in three different buildings, with 300 to 400 girls attending. He estimates that more students at Chalco received the blessed sacrament than any other place in the world during that time in the pandemic. The paradox was that the poverty of the children, because they were poor, became the place where Jesus poured out His Love the most during the pandemic. Had they not been poor, they would not have been there. So these poor, traumatized children were holding up the world. Fr. Dan does not think there was any other place in the world where 2000 people were receiving the blessed sacrament every day. He also offered frequent opportunities for Adoration, also not found much in the rest of the world at that time.

THE POOR — Scripture tells us "The poor you will always have with you." Most of our approaches to the poor as a church are through corporeal works of mercy (feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty...), but very few have a relationship with the poor. There are many reasons for that, including fears. "The poor" is often looked at as a collective noun, "the team", "the herd", "the flock", but when Mother Teresa referred to "the poor", the Poor was One, it was Jesus Christ. ... For most of us, the poor is just something, not someone. Fr. Dan believes this is how the church approaches it for the most part, and so we can feel agitated by second collections focused on the poor, or on missions serving the poor. The deeper reality is that most of us do not know our own poverty. We do not even want to touch our own poverty. We do not look at poverty as a relationship. We can feel put upon if someone asks us to sacrifice for the poor. "What does that little Mexican girl have to do with me?" Everything! Not one of us has done any more work or sacrifice than most of the poor. The difference is we were born in the United States. People in poor countries are working two or three jobs, getting up early, coming home late at night. We say it is unfair. But it is not a part of our lives.

BROKEN — Fr. Dan has seen both sides — he has been there when the mission priest has talked at Mass, and he has also been that mission priest asking for the poor. And people just bristle. There is something deeply broken in that reality. Even in the giving season, we do not give sacrificially. We are still buying to excess — can we truly say that we love the poor when we spend the way we do? It is inconsistent. Sometimes we give to the poor to pacify our own emotions. The struggle with the poor is we do not want to love them because we do not know our own poverty. Christ loves our poverty, but He does not love our blessings. He wants to fill the poverty in each one of us. When we come to Him, He does not respond with bristling. Since we are always asking Him, it is disappointing that we feel so put upon when we are asked to give sacrificially of the least important thing of time, talent and treasure, namely treasure. ... The poor know that they are hungry. The poor do not have to be convinced of the love of the Eucharist; they want Jesus. We do not hunger the way the poor do for the Eucharist, for Jesus. Fr. Dan is spending his time now convincing first world people that they need Jesus Christ, when he left a whole parish of 3000 children who are dying for Jesus. It is not just. We have a first world church mentality. We have expectations of our priests, of where and when Mass is offered, that it be for our convenience. We demand this.

THE FUTURE OF THE CHURCH — Fr. Dan believes the future of the Church is in Eucharistic Adoration, not more and more Masses. We would revolutionize the culture if everyone committed to one hour of Adoration a week. When we come before the blessed sacrament, we are beggars, we are the hungry man in the bread line. We are not "better" because we go to daily Mass, we are not "better" because we go to regular confession. Yet we often have an attitude of entitlement, of expectation. If we approach the sacrament properly, we will come as a beggar, and grateful. ... We can affect what is happening in the culture by our time — one hour a week, or five minutes a day, praying for the children who are being trafficked at this moment. Fr. Dan shared some experiences with parishioners in his

new parish. Many come from Latin America. He talked of a young woman who had come to the U.S., only to be prostituted for three years starting at age 16. So many women go through this trauma. The sister of this young woman had been through a similar ordeal, and they also had never spoken about it to each other — they shared the same wound, and the devil had separated them. Through the church, and Fr. Dan's gentle questioning them to tell him their story, they found each other and were able to share their trauma, and heal themselves and reconnect their relationship. ... We go to Adoration to be healed, or to continue the process of healing. Do we think of ourselves as not needing healing? If trauma never happened to us, we should be on our knees in gratitude. If trauma did happen to us, we should be on our knees to heal. The body of Christ is one body. For the most part, we tune out because what makes us feel uncomfortable seems unreal, and so the alternative is to buy, to shop, to be self-consumed. We are so self-consumed because we do not want to face the suffering that is around us.

SERVING THE POOR — The Eucharist encourages us to bring us out of ourselves sacrificially. The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is supposed to be sacrificial, not just communion. When we are simply in communion with one another, it does not cost us anything and neither one of us is changing. That is NOT where the healing is. However, when our communion with each other is sacrificial, we no longer simply commiserate about our brokenness, but we begin to heal together authentically. What the Lord is asking of us is to look at our love for the blessed sacrament, and to help us come out of ourselves, help us overcome ourselves. ... At the end of the day, how much time did we give to the poor? How much did we sacrifice for the poor? How much we give should outweigh what we have given to our loved ones. We should be giving more to help the poor. It is not easy. Fr. Dan offered suggestions.

- Make a commitment every day to pray for the poor, however we wish to do it.
- Pick a community overseas that we love (possibly a Parish mission), and help them. Pick an international and a local charity.

Serving the poor is not a theory, it is a daily decision that involves sacrifice. We can choose to not need things, and ask for the poor. We can choose to give gifts for the poor on behalf of other people. We need to re-think how we serve the poor, how they benefit from us. We need to advocate for them. Matthew 25 tells us we will be held accountable! The Eucharist should bring us out of ourselves to serve. Then we have interior freedom and the poor will no longer be a collective noun, but one person, Jesus Christ. Giving to the poor should hurt.

THINKING DIFFERENTLY — Fr. Dan gave an example of someone who wanted to take him out to a restaurant. Fr. Dan suggested eating in, saving considerable cost, and asked him to give the difference in the money saved to the poor. What would our reaction be in such a scenario? If we have an intentionality for the poor, we would be all in on this plan. We have disposable income, but do not use it to save souls, to evangelize the poor. It is not just about food distribution, but about a relationship with Jesus Christ. We give the food, and ask them to pray with us. And if they do not want to pray, we say we will pray for them. ... Think differently. Do not fall asleep, living by going from thing to thing, never thinking about the poor. Think about the sin of omission — we know what to do, but we do not do it. It becomes a sin of omission when a TASTE speaker talks about the poor and now knowing the truth, we do nothing to help them. If there is an inherent lack of love for the poor, we will feel uncomfortable because we are not serving the poor, we are not loving the poor. ... Venerable Fr. Al Schwartz (founder of World Villages for Children) had some ideas about how to serve the poor:

- For priests, he suggested that for a week of vacation, they should give a week to the poor.
- For the laity, he suggested that whatever we spend on vacation, we give the same amount to the poor. And as our finances increase, we keep the same standard of living.

Think of the poor and connect it to the Eucharist. Think differently so we can begin to realize that what should drive our love for the poor is our own poverty, not that we have to "solve" them. This is what will give us joy and peace.

ANIMA CHRISTI — Fr. Dan concluded his talk by telling us a little about Anima Christi, and the charities he selected to be part of it. We are blessed. We have money to change lives. He encouraged us to give something that will change people's lives, to pick a charity, and to teach the younger generation to give too.