**Finding the Poor**

|  |
| --- |
| The 25th chapter of Mark’s Gospel relates the story of Jesus teaching about how God would separate the sheep and goats in heaven. Jesus uses these familiar words:  *For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you made me welcome,* |
|  |
| The crowd was puzzled and wondered:  *"Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink?* |

Jesus lays out the now familiar answer: “in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me."

Jesus reminds us that when we choose to help the poor we are serving God through love for our fellow man.

But, I’ll bet many of us have forgotten the second half of the story. Jesus makes another, critical point. He says:

*“In so far as you* ***neglected*** *to do this to one of the least of these, you neglected to do it to* ***me****."*

Jesus teaches that we have an affirmative responsibility to reach out to the least of our brothers…when we neglect **them**, we neglect the **Lord**…

And, just to be clear what’s at stake He points out: those who neglect the poor will “…go away to eternal punishment…” while those who don’t will have eternal life.

It’s pretty much there in black and white…Clearly and unambiguously, Christ lays out that our help for others is part of our path to eternal salvation.

To a degree, we are all like the crowd gathered around Jesus asking to be taught ***when*** and ***how*** to see the poor.

Our parish has a wonderful history of helping when asked…

This year the Community Service Ministry wants to challenge you to do more…to ask yourself….how can I better ***see*** those most in need? And, what am I doing to help find and serve them?

This Thursday, January 19, we are sponsoring an educational session with a speaker from Harvest Food and Outreach that will help you learn about the challenges faced by the poor in our County. This one-hour presentation will help you understand what life in poverty is like.

Consider these characteristics shared by the least of your brothers right here in Indian River County:

* They know which of the many local thrift shops offer ‘fill the bag sales’ and when those sales are held;
* They know which grocery stores have garbage bins can be accessed to find discarded, but edible, food;
* They know how to get someone out of jail…

The centerpiece of the evening will be a series of exercises in which you’ll find out how your lifestyle compares to the most poor in our country. I’ve taken the test and it’s an eye-opening experience. That presentation will be at 7:00 in the Parish Center this Thursday evening.

Later in the spring, we will also be featuring a “Food for Thought” luncheon in conjunction the The Treasure Coast Food Bank. On March 9th, in the Parish Center, representatives of the Food Bank will be on hand to help you understand the needs of the hungry here in our County. They’ll have their mobile pantry on hand for you to view. And, they will be recruiting volunteers to work in helping with their food pantry activities.

At each of these educational sessions, you’ll learn more about the many opportunities to serve offered by your Community Service Ministry. Whatever your interest: helping a child learn to read, serving as a Big Brother or Sister, providing entertainment and holiday joy to the elderly…delivering a meal to a shut-in…working with our Youth Group or on our annual Lenten Service Project, our Community Service Ministry is there to help you…getting started is as simple as calling Pat Kroger in the Parish Office…

St. Augustine said each of us should determine how much God has given us and take from that the amount we need. Anything else is needed by others.

We want to help you find those who **need** what you have to **give** of your **time**. Join us this Thursday as a first step to knowing the poor, the least of your brothers, today’s manifestations of our Lord…join us as a first step in doing for God that which his love and grace calls from each of us every day.

Thank you and God bless.