

Fr. Charles Puthota's Blog

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From the Pastor's Desktop



Dear Parishioners of St. Elizabeth,

With No One Left Behind: A Scripture Reflection

(The following Scripture Reflection by Fr. Charles Puthota was published in the Archdiocesan Catholic San Francisco for this Sunday of October 11, 2020, the 28th Sunday in Ordinary Time)

Walking from St. Elizabeth Church last week to anoint a parishioner in the neighborhood, I saw a long line of people winding around Dr. MLK Jr Academic Middle School campus on Girard Street. They were waiting to pick up food bags distributed by San Francisco-Marin Food Bank. Talking to the organizers, I came to know that they distribute once a week over 900 food bags at this location as they do in other places as well. Anyone could receive food or donate or volunteer.

Aren't we well aware of organizations like the Missionaries of Charity (Mother Teresa Sisters), Catholic Charities, Catholic Relief Services, and St. Vincent de Paul doing commendable works of charity? St. Anthony Foundation on Golden Gate Avenue over decades has served over 42 million hot, sit-down meals, averaging about a million meals every year, among their other works of charity. There are other organizations like the Good Shepherd Sisters' Gracenter on Bacon Street helping women in addiction recovery. Charities like the Catholic Worker Hospitality House in San Bruno offer food, shelter, and affordable housing.

When we scan the gamut of God's work going on in the Church and the world---especially in terms of helping the poor and vulnerable---it is absolutely astounding and uplifting. There is so much goodness and generosity in our hearts that overflows---in aid of others who are so much in need, especially these days of the pandemic, when so many have lost so much. Wouldn't it be wise and timely if all organizations, businesses, and churches could set aside a budget, however small, despite their own diminished revenues, to help those in most need these sad days?

In doing all these works of charity, no doubt, we reflect our Father, who is the God of the poor and the downtrodden. He speaks to us in the Word of God this Sunday and inspires us to be like him---and sends us out to do more to alleviate suffering. The Eucharist that we so fondly and devoutly celebrate week after week, day after day, impels us to share bread with the hungry because Jesus himself has shared with us his body and blood. Having been fed with the Bread of Life, we are to go out to feed others. Our faith is love that does justice.

In the poetic reading from Isaiah, God "will provide for all peoples" abundant, sumptuous, delicious food. He doesn't stop with the gift of extraordinary food. He "will wipe away the tears from every face." Imagine the blessing of a person who can stretch out one's hand to the face of someone weeping in suffering or loss or grief--and wiping away the tears. This gesture says: Please do not weep, I'm with you. I share your sorrow. I'll do anything in my power to take away your pain. Do not worry. That's what Jesus said and did to the widow of Nain who had lost her only son: "Do not weep" (Luke 7:13).

God's blessings don't stop there. He will remove our "reproach," all the humiliation and indignities we face in life. Our failures, hurts, and diminishment are placed in the heart of God. He will demolish every power contriving to rob us of the glory of being the children of God. Not only that. "He will destroy death forever." A sign of sin and evil, death will be vanquished so that we could be born into eternal life. Here in this world already, we shall battle the death-dealing forces, all those powers arrayed against God and the grandeur of human existence.

All this can be expressed in one ultimate blessing: salvation. We will be filled and fulfilled. We will be saved from suffering, reproach, and death. We will also be saved from ourselves because we could be our own worst enemies at times because of our harmful tendencies acting against God.

The gospel parable of the messianic wedding feast draws out attention to those who do not want to be part of the lavish blessings of God. They not only decline the invitation but also indulge in violent deeds against the spirit of the banquet. But God includes everyone, though the "wedding garment" reminds us that nothing can be taken for granted on account of the need for a continuous, non-complacent response to God's blessings. Reflecting on the spiritual blessings, in the second reading, Paul knows how to navigate through poverty and plenty because "God will truly supply whatever you need, in accord with the glorious riches in Christ Jesus." These glorious riches that God showers on us through Jesus Christ inspire us to go out of ourselves to make the same blessings---material and spiritual---accessible to all peoples, with no one left behind.

Your Friend & Pastor,

Fr. Charles Puthota