

Lesson 8

CHURCH AND CHARITABLE WORKS



On the last judgement day, Jesus will let those who did good stand on His right and those who did evil on His left. He will tell those who are on the right. "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me. I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.... you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you

did it to me". (Mt. 25 : 34-40). This Gospel Passage is not simply an invitation to do charitable deeds. Instead, it is a very powerful teaching to recognise the special presence of Jesus in the poor and love them.

Active Faith

Charitable deeds of the Church are services of the Church to show the world the face of Jesus who sought and did good to the afflicted, the sick and the sinners and to uplift them materially and spiritually, seeing the face of Jesus in them. Anyone who receives the message of the Gospel cannot sit idle without doing deeds of charity because the Word of God compels us to do so.

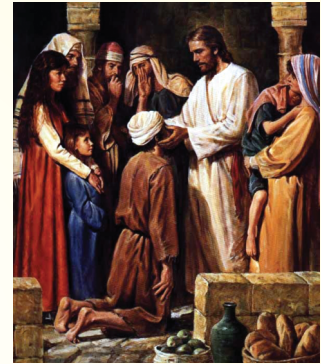
St. Paul exhorts us that "the only thing that counts is faith working through love" (Gal. 5:6). The essence of the Word of God is love. Those who love will see the needs of others as one's own. They will not be able to close their eyes towards the need of the suffering. The exhortation of the apostle James that faith without action is dead also leads us to faith that is active (James 2:17). Hence we must understand that the reflection of faith is charitable deeds.



Charitable deeds do not confine itself to simply giving money or things for temporary use. It is a total commitment to one's integral growth. Its best examples are St. Vincent de Paul, who worked for the uplift of the poor; Fr. Damien who heard of the sufferings of the lepers who were exiled to the island of Molocho, who committed himself to their uplift and became a leper himself and died there; Mother Theresa of Calcutta who brought the dying and the orphans, left on the streets of Calcutta, to her own Ashram, nursed them and protected them, providing for their needs, are shining examples of charitable deeds. There are individuals in the Church, even today, who give up their own comforts and pleasures and work for the marginalised and the backward in society.

The Basis of the Charitable Deeds of the Church

The example and teachings of Jesus is the basis of the charitable deeds of the Church. Jesus, in His public life, showed special concern towards the sinners, the sick and the suffering. Jesus became everything to everyone by healing the sick, forgiving sinners and comforting the afflicted. He invited to Him all those who weary and carrying heavy burdens (Mt. 11:28). Jesus who taught us through the parable of the good Samaritan that those who help the needy are good neighbours, asks us to do so. (Lk. 10:25-37). The parable of the rich man and Lazarus teaches us that closing your eyes towards the needy is a sin deserving hell. This negligence goes against the law of love which God has given us.



Activity -1. Read the second chapter of the epistle of apostle James and write down the sentences dealing with the need of helping others.

The apostles also trained the early Church to do charitable deeds. The word of God witnesses: “There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need” (Acts 4: 34-35). The early Church was specially concerned about helping the Church communities who were in need (Acts 11:28-30).

Teachings of the Church

There are many apostolic teachings exhorting on social justice and the role of the Church in charitable deeds. The social teachings of the Church like ‘Rerum Novarum’, ‘Mother and Teacher’, ‘Peace on Earth’, ‘Human Progress’ etc. deal with this issue. The Church exhorts through these documents to work for the welfare of humanity based on truth, justice, love and personal freedom. The Fathers of the

Church like St. Basil, St. Chrisostom, etc. teaches us about the importance of charitable deeds. St. Basil teaches that the food, the clothes and the footwear kept in shelf belong to the hungry, the naked and the barefooted. This reminds us that we have to share with the needy whatever we have in store and even what we have stored for tomorrow. St. Chrisostom exhorts that when we build houses, one room is to be set apart for Jesus and it should be open for way-farers and the homeless. This points out the Christian attitude we should keep in our life to help the poor and needy.



The charitable Deeds of the Church

There are various types of and fields of charitable deeds of the Church. They are mainly

1. Orphans and children and elders who are rejected from their own houses.
2. The old who suffer from lack of help or presence of their children and relatives.
3. The sick and the dying.
4. The physically challenged persons.
5. The helpless and the neglected due to mental retardation.
6. The mentally sick persons.
7. Exploited women and children.
8. AIDS and cancer patients.
9. The poor and the homeless.
10. Those who are neglected in the community and those who are denied justice.
11. Those who suffer from war, natural calamities etc.
12. The prisoners and those who are released from prison and their dependents.

Activity-2. Visit an institution in your neighbourhood where charitable deeds are done and prepare a report of their services.

In circumstances like this, the Church engages in charitable deeds with the light of Gospel message. There are special institutions and set up in the Church for those who suffer in various ways. They remain as lighthouses of service. Some of

them are old age homes, orphanages, hospitals, centres of protection and training for the mentally and physically handicapped, rehabilitation centres and other centres for the treatment of mental patients, houses for the destitute etc. The Church is intent on seeing the face of Jesus in all of them and accepting them without any distinction of wealth, caste, creed, religion or sex.



We can co-operate with the Church and offer our services for the charitable activities of the Church. Let us involve ourselves in these charitable deeds by donating money, through our sacrifices, prayer and visiting the houses of the destitute and such other institutions.



Let us Read the Word of God and Meditate

Mk. 16 : 14-17

A Word of God to Remember

“Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action”
(1 Jn 3:18)

Let us Pray

O merciful Jesus, strengthen us to see you in the sick, the old, the weak, the retarded and the afflicted and help them.

My Decision

I will give up getting luxury articles and help the poor with money so saved.

Let us think with the Church

“As time passed and the Church grew, charitable activities were accepted and confirmed as one of the most important activities of the Church. Along with the administration of sacraments and proclamation of the Gospel, charitable deeds also continued: love for the widows, the orphans, the prisoners, the sick and the needy became very important for the Church. Just as the Church cannot give up the sacraments and the Word, she cannot give up charitable deeds”
(God is Love. DCE-22).

Let us find out the answers

1. What is a charitable deed ?
2. Write the names of five important documents of the Church on Social justice and charitable deeds.
3. What is the foundation of charitable deeds in the Church ?
4. How can we put into practice the teachings of St. Basil and St. Chrisostom in our approach to the poor ?
5. What are the areas of our charitable deeds ?