

26<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time is celebrated as the **World Day of Migrants and Refugees**. The scripture readings on this day stress the **Covenant responsibility** of the rich for the poor, reminding us of the truth that wealth without active mercy for the poor is sin.

Prophet of Social Justice, Amos, time and again, warned the wealthy people of Samaria, that they had riches at the expense of the poor and their wealth had led them to vice, but to no avail. They went on making a show of their wealth, adorning their homes with all sorts of luxuries. They felt secure in their wealth and never thought either of God or for the poor in their midst. Their happiness was short lived, destruction struck their so-called 'Ivory House' and life ended in slavery.

Jesus presents the parable of the rich man. Wealth had made this man utterly selfish and filled him with pride. This man, like the people of Samaria had made his belly his God and feasted sumptuously every day. He too had no thought either of God or for his neighbor. He thought his wealth was enough to take care of him and make him happy. The sin of the rich man is not that he did not do any harm, but that he did not do any good.

Lazarus was utterly destitute, hungry and covered with sores. But one can feel that he kept his dignity and piety intact in spite of it all. He had little to expect from the abundance of food from the rich man's table, yet he kept his trust that God could come to his rescue. Dogs were more merciful to him than rich man. The dogs which licked his sores probably also stole the little bread he got for himself. Dogs in the ancient world symbolized contempt. Enduring the torment of these savage dogs only added to the poor man's miseries and sufferings.

What does the story tell us? It does not teach that rich people are sinners and poor people are saints. Nor is it teaching the existence of heaven and hell. Lesson conveyed by Jesus is that the Pharisees were wrong in thinking that their wealth was a sign of God's reward for their following of the law and rituals. Neither is poverty a sign that the poor people come second in God's love. Their trust in God will not fail them, while those who put their trust in wealth, are in for a rude shock when their end comes.

Augustine of Hippo says, "God made both the rich and the poor. So, the rich and the poor are born alike. You meet one another as you walk on the way together. Do not oppress or defraud anyone. One may be needy and another may have plenty. But the Lord is the maker of them both. Through the person who has, He helps the one who needs - and through the person who does not have, He tests the one who has."

Often wealth causes havoc in the hearts of humans. Jesus knew the heart of humans too well. The rich man treated Lazarus with contempt and indifference, until he found his fortunes reversed at the end of his life! In **God's economy**, those who hold on possessively to what they have, lose it all in the end, while those who share generously receive back many times more than they gave away.

We are not all equal financially, but we do **share a natural and basic obligation to each other**. We have been reminded of that in the Encyclical letters of Pope Francis, 'Laudato Si' (on care for our Common Home) and 'Fratelli Tutti' (on Fraternity and Social Friendship). Recently, representing over 120 countries the young people gathered in Assisi for the **Economy of Francesco**. These young people came to share their ideas and expertise to better the world, through economic systems that reflect the **principles and values of St. Francis of Assisi**. Pope Francis calls on the young people of the Economy of Francesco to work for social, relational and spiritual sustainability, and to recognize the cry of the poor and the cry of the planet.

We all have something to share with our world. God has blessed each one of us with various blessings in forms of time, talents and treasures. For us Franciscans, it is our vocation to embrace the poor, the migrants and refugees who are waiting for a better life. Whatever little we do for the least of these people, we do it for God who is the Creator of us all. Recently, during the Chapter of Election of Our Lady of the Angels Regional Fraternity of Secular Franciscans, I witnessed lots of blessings in the group present to elect the Council. Lots of good ideas and new enthusiasm among the delegates to serve the least of the society. If we truly live the **principles and values of St. Francis of Assisi** in our world, injustice and inequality will be eradicated. Thus, we can all make our world a better place for all to live.