

SOCIAL WORK

"Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto Me."

I have been working in Spain for 41 years. In spite of religious intolerance and widespread prejudice the work began to flourish when we became involved in meeting the physical and social needs of the people. Very few people are aware or awakened to their spiritual needs. Particularly in a country as spiritually dark as Spain where all they knew was Roman Catholicism, there was little awareness of spiritual needs. They were very conscious of the need of their sons and daughters hooked on drugs and the delinquency that developed as a result. When we began to meet those needs and God began to do miracles of deliverance, the populace began to take notice.

The central government became aware of the work going on and sent seven senators from three political parties to evaluate what was happening. Mayors became sympathetic to our work and land was donated by the city. People generally, even unchurched people, instinctively know what Christianity is supposed to be. They know it is not simply attending church or Mass and listening to sermons. When I was in Colombia, S.A. I noticed that the Catholic Church was respected because of their social work. The nuns were ministering to orphans, the aged and the infirm. Mother Teresa was respected and venerated because of her sacrificial life given to the poor. On the contrary the common man in the street in Bogotá, Colombia, had little or no respect for the Evangelicals. The common opinion was, "if you want to become rich, become a pastor."

When Jesus fed the multitudes on two occasions he had the people sit down in groups of 50 or so. He did not instruct the disciples to feed the first three rows and expect them to pass it on. The disciples were commanded to bring the food to all equally. Do you think the money spent on the support of churches is equitable? 90% of the money given in churches is spent on the 10% of the population of the world that speak English. And what about the food distribution? While so much emphasis is made upon losing weight, millions are nearly starving to death!

If a man who had five children and fed one and supplied his every need and whim, while leaving the others in rags and half starved, I'm sure we would condemn such unjust inhuman treatment. But does not God our Father see some of his children who have more than enough and others in great need? Has He not blessed us so that we can bless the world? Is He not the Father of orphans and husband of widows? Does He not use the Church, the Body of Christ to meet the needs of the world? Give according to your income lest God make your income according to your giving.

And then we have the abortion issue. It is laudable to see the fight against the terrible crime of abortion. I fully support these efforts. But I ask you in the name of God what are you doing for the children already born, abused and unloved? How many Christians go to the homes for children that have been taken away from abusive situations or alcoholic parents? What about those suffering sexual abuse in dysfunctional homes? REMAR, the organization we started in 1984 is now in 57 countries, ministering to the social needs of children, addicts and prostitutes around the world, under the direction of Miguel Díez.

In the Center where we live in Spain, the youth now rehabilitated minister in the hospital, a nursing home and street evangelism. Cell meetings are being started and in spite of the terrible oppression, they are making a difference. I direct a number of churches in Spain and those that are involved in social work are alive and vibrant and growing. Those pastors who have received the same teaching and just have church as usual, are seeing little growth either spiritually or numerically.

Let us consider another aspect. In Matthew 25, Jesus made it very clear that we would be judged by how we met the needs of the less fortunate. He said we minister to Him by feeding and clothing the needy, by helping the orphans and widows. Actually He said if we did not do it, we would be lost.

"Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.

For I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink:

I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not.

Then shall they also answer Him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?

Then shall He answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to Me."

(Matthew 25: 41-45)

To receive Jesus as your Saviour entails receiving Him as Lord. To receive Him as Lord, means to take seriously these admonitions. If the church is to show forth the love, concern and compassion of Jesus it must become involved with the needs of the people. We are His hands extended.

Of course, we all think of the needs of our families and local churches first. This is as it should be. But a provocative thought that comes to me is from the story of the good Samaritan. We know the Samaritans were despised by the Jews. But it is obvious that the Samaritans shared these same feelings towards the Jews. The good Samaritan, had compassion on the Jew that had fallen among thieves. The priests and Levites did not bother to help the victim of robbery, because he was not of their synagogue. Also, I'm sure they had to give a sermon on loving God and loving their neighbour as themselves and had to meet a deadline. Helping this poor soul would make them late for church!

And I draw your attention to the elderly in Nursing Homes. At this age they are most vulnerable and weak. Maybe they have served the Lord all their lives but now they are facing the ultimate and most difficult test. Now as never before they need faith to keep on living and faith to cross the great divide: to face the unknown. Many are left to die alone. They wait in vain for children or grandchildren to visit. They long for a smiling face and some sign that the world cares and knows they exist. James said that true religion and undefiled was to visit the orphans and the widows and to keep oneself unspotted from the world. We have an "adopt a horse" program, we are moved to sympathy to adopt a dog or cat from the animal shelter. But what about beginning an "adopt a granny" program? What about going once a week to visit someone's mother who is facing the demons of hell who are whispering, "nobody cares", "God has forgotten you."

What about fasting sometime and sending the money of that meal to some starving children? I have seen children from five years old and upward living in the streets. I know of children living in the telephone and electric cable tunnels under the cities. I have seen children inhaling glue to appease the hunger pains and especially the pain of being unloved. I have seen children eating old dried chicken bones weeks after they were thrown out. I can't get these images out of my mind and want to share their pain with you. Maybe you should consider going to the mission field or meeting the needs of the needy children in orphanages in your community. The little children who die and the aborted babies will go to heaven. But those left in the streets (50 million) may grow up to hate and become hit men or criminals. In some countries there is a bounty on the heads of street children! Maybe you will be challenged by this message to begin an "adopt a granny" program. You don't need money to do it and don't wash your hands by just giving an offering. Money is no substitute for love and compassion.

I wonder who were the people Jesus directed his words to in Matthew 25? Who has the greatest need, we who have an abundance and do not share it or the poor and helpless? I think we have greater need to help these less fortunate than they have need of being helped. We need to obey the Lord's command to feed the hungry and dress the naked and visit the fatherless or suffer His disapproval.

There is no greater incentive than from these words of Jesus. "*He that receiveth one of these little ones receiveth me.*" We talk about receiving Christ, well here is one practical way of doing it.

I saw a sign on the billboard of one of our churches here in Georgia. It read, "Come and try our new pews". I hope they had more to offer than that. The elderly in nursing homes or hospital beds don't want to sit in cushioned pews, they need someone to hold their hand, to care, and to read a comforting word from the Bible. When I called churches to find help for someone I got an answering machine announcing the time of the services. If you want to help the addict or alcoholic or someone else in need, you can't merely invite them to church. The Lord, speaking through the prophet Isaiah said "*Is not this the fast that I have chosen? To deal thy bread to the hungry and that thou bring the poor that are cast out (rejected) to THY HOUSE? When thou seest the naked that thou cover him, and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? (Isaiah 58:6-7)* Then God has promised:

"...then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noon day: And the Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not." (Is. 58:10-19).

My calling has been to speak for the dumb, for those whose voice is not heard, who cannot get into our nice churches. I have seen two deacons in Colombia, S.A. literally throw a poor man out into the street simply because he was a poor homeless man. Gandhi said he would have become a Christian were it not for the Christians. We are the light of the world. Let it shine. Let men see our good works, not our buildings and glorify God. He loves you, show it to others.

In His Name who became a man,

Daniel Del Vecchio