

During my college seminary formation, five seminarians and I organized an apostolate to visit the poorest of the poor families in Tondo, Manila. The place is the garbage dump site of Manila. Thousands of families reside there. They comb through the trash to collect plastic bottles or jugs and aluminum cans for resale. See the photo:



When we arrived there, all of us were very anxious because of the smell and the sponginess of the ground. But, all of the discomfort disappeared when the families greeted us and welcomed us warmly with smiles and juice packs. Juice packs from the poorest of the poor for seminarians in their cassocks! Amazing! They were so hospitable and welcoming.

Lesson: every human being when seen, listened to, respected and treated with dignity has something to share no matter how poor.

In Sunday's first reading, a woman of influence who "has no son and her husband is getting on in years" provided a room and meals for the prophet Elisha. The woman's hospitality and welcome prompted Elisha to look into her need asking his servant, Gehazi, "Can something be done for her?" Gehazi replied "Yes!" Thus, Elisha promised the woman, "This time next year you will be fondling a baby son." Hospitality and welcome elicit love, admiration, trust, gratitude or in this case, motherhood for a childless woman and the life of a son!

Pope Francis believes the COVID-19 pandemic is an opportunity to genuinely see the humanity of the poor. He also calls on the Church to be "freed in the midst of the crisis" to meet people's needs, not "closed off in institutions." As a member of St. James, I am happy that as a church we are responding generously to Pope Francis' call, meeting the needs of those displaced and affected by the pandemic through the "Between the Cracks Fund." Thank you!

That leads us to the Gospel: "Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me." It is our daily challenge to see the face of Christ in the other no matter what color, age, sexual orientation or financial status but especially in the poor. Pope Francis puts it in these words: "To see the poor can help us to discover the piety which points towards God and towards our neighbor."

The Juneteenth event "Pray On Troost" was a call to pray—to ask God for justice, for peace, for love, for equality, for unity, for respect, for trust.... Prayer is very important. It is the way to be connected with God; a way to get the courage and strength to do God's will. For somebody who has been discriminated multiple times since I arrived in this country 32 years ago, prayer is where I get my affirmation and consolation.

After praying, however, action must be taken. The virtues written on tapes and put on our masks for "Pray On Troost" need to be practiced. I recall archbishop Oscar Romero's words: "A religion of Sunday Masses but unjust week days does not please the Lord, a religion of much prayer but with hypocrisy in the heart is not Christian."

May we reach out and offer hospitality and kindness to those we meet each day, either in person or virtually, especially those most in need of our help. May we break injustice, inequality and discrimination by loving, trusting and respecting the other person.