

# Dilexi Te:

*On Love for the Poor*

*A Biblical Resource for  
Parish Group Discussions*



**“Just as  
you did it  
to one of the  
least of these  
my brothers  
and sisters,  
you did it  
to me.”**

**Matthew  
25:40**



THE  
GOD  
WHO  
SPEAKS



## How This Resource Works

This practical resource is designed for parish groups to explore the Biblical foundations of Pope Leo's Apostolic Exhortation *'Dilexi Te: On Love for the Poor'*.

It will help you and your group to:

**Reflect** on 'Dilexi Te' in your parish and local community.

**Explore** the Biblical texts that shape the key themes of poverty and the poor.

**Look** at images that reflect the key themes of poverty and the poor.

**Discuss** some suggested questions.

**Take action** in your parish and local community.

It is divided into five sections exploring different facets of poverty and the poor in Scripture, Tradition and in the world today.

### Time for each session

Allow 90 minutes (1½ hours). If you wish to extend the time, make sure there is a break.

### Structure

**a** Start with the Opening Prayer said by someone in the group.

*Allow 5 minutes.*

**b** All read the Introduction at the first session in silence.

*Allow 10 minutes. Or ask people to read it before they arrive.*

*Allow for a short time of quiet before moving on.*

**c** All read the Main Reflection in silence.

*Allow 10 minutes before moving on.*

**d** All read some of the Scripture texts in silence.

*Allow 10 minutes before moving on.*

**e** All look at the Painting and Questions in silence.

*Allow 10 minutes before moving on.*

**f** Explore the Group Discussion Points in small groups.

*Allow 10 minutes before moving on.*

**g** Explore any other insights emerging as a group.

*Allow 15 minutes before moving on.*

*Allow the discussion to flow and for everyone who wishes to speak to have the opportunity.*

*Try to avoid letting one or two people dominate the conversation.*

*Do not make people speak if they prefer to sit and listen instead.*

**h** All commit to an Action either as individuals or as a group in the coming week.

*Allow 15 minutes.*

**i** End with the Closing Prayer, said by someone in the group or all together.

*Allow 5 minutes.*

All Biblical quotations in this resource are taken from the English Standard Version: Catholic Edition.

# Themes for each session

- **Week 1 - I have loved you.**
- **Week 2 - God chooses the poor.**
- **Week 3 - A Church for the poor.**
- **Week 4 - A history that continues.**
- **Week 5 - A constant challenge.**

*The condition of the poor is a cry that, throughout human history, constantly challenges our lives, societies, political and economic systems, and, not least, the Church. On the wounded faces of the poor, we see the suffering of the innocent and, therefore, the suffering of Christ himself.*

***Dilexi Te: On Love for the Poor. (Par. 9.)***







**“Those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen cannot love God whom they have not seen”.**

**1 John 4:20b**

## **Introduction**

‘Dilexi Te’ draws on the Bible to help us understand God’s revelation to the world, and the ways in which we are called to follow his Son, Jesus Christ. It charts a journey through our Church’s History, its sacred Tradition and alongside the many people who have been inspired by Scripture to serve the poor, challenge injustice and transform the world. These lay men and women, clergy, religious orders, saints, theologians and popes, motivate us to continue this building up of God’s kingdom today.

‘Dilexi Te’ uses powerful imagery to communicate the central themes of Christ’s love for the poor and the Church’s mission to serve them.

- We are reminded of the Old Testament’s portrayal of God as the “friend and liberator of the poor” and God as the “refuge of the poor” through Moses and the prophets.
- Jesus’ identification with the poor through his incarnation consistently made him the “Messiah of the poor” and for the poor.
- The Biblical emphasis on the dignity of every human person is to be respected today, and not just tomorrow.
- In every rejected migrant and refugee, it is Christ himself who knocks at the door of the community.
- The preferential option for the poor runs throughout Scripture and is a source of renewal for the Church and society.
- Works of mercy and charity established in the Old Testament and developed further in the New Testament are a sign of authentic worship.



The Christological imagery emphasises the encounter with Jesus *in* the poor. This includes seeing the suffering Christ in the 'wounded faces of the poor' and recognising Christ in migrants and rejected individuals. Christ's own life of poverty, from his birth in a manger to his death on a cross, is highlighted to stress that serving the poor is integral to following him.

The ecclesiological imagery uses several images for the Church's relationship with the poor. The Church is portrayed as a compassionate mother who welcomes, supports and embraces migrants and all those who suffer. This is clearly expressed in the idea of: "A Church which is poor and for the poor," while the image of a "river of light and life" also describes the Church's tradition of caring for the poor.

The socio-cultural imagery contrasts Christian values with modern societal issues such as:

- a** The 'throwaway culture' which promotes consumption for its own sake rather than a life orientated towards promoting the common good.
- b** The 'bubble of comfort and luxury' which detaches some individuals, who are often apathetic, from the widespread poverty and injustice around them. They fail to see that their wealth may have been created at a cost to others who become or remain poor as a result.
- c** The 'economies that kill' and 'structural sin' that increase inequality on the larger scale.

An alternative model of Kingdom values based on the 'economy of solidarity' is then offered using the example of Benedictine monasteries.



## **Opening Prayer**

**Lord,**

*We pray that through your vision of the kingdom here on earth,  
we may work for social justice.*

*We do not want to fly from your world but to engage within it.*

*Where there is injustice help us to find ways to eradicate it.*

*Where basic human rights are denied and life drains away,  
be with us to fight for equality and for dignity.*

*May ours be voices for change and compassion where none exist.*

*Stimulate our hearts to provide food, clothing and shelter  
for your children who have none.*

*Help us engage in a politics based upon gospel values,*

*serving you our Living God, through our service of your creation.*

*May our world be transformed into the paradise you first dreamed. **Amen.***

## **Main Reflection**

In this Apostolic Exhortation, Pope Leo completes what Pope Francis began in ‘Dilexit Nos’. Together they show a unity of teaching – that to care for the poor is to encounter Christ in the poor whose cry we must respond to, and that this way of care is a path to holiness.

Right at the start, Pope Leo refers to two dimensions of poverty through the eyes and hearts of women: Mary, the mother of Jesus who in her Canticle to Elizabeth prophesies that the poor will be raised up and the rich and powerful cast down (Luke 1:46-55). And in the house of Simon the leper in Bethany, is the woman who lavishly anointed Jesus’ head with a very expensive perfume. This so appalled the disciples who saw this act as a waste – the perfume could have been sold and spent on the poor. (Matthew 26:6-13).

Pope Leo links three sayings of Jesus: “The poor you will always have with you”. (Matthew 26:11). “I am with you always” (Matthew 28:20) and “Just as you did it to one of these brothers or sisters of mine, you did it to me” (Matthew 25:40) as mutually interpreting each other. So Jesus makes it very clear where we can encounter him.

This Gospel teaching by Pope Francis and Pope Leo finds its recent inspiration in the history of the Church of South America in which they have both served. It roots the whole Church in the preferential option for the poor as a potential renewal for both our Church and society.


In hearing the cry of the poor, we come close to the heart of God’s self-revelation in his liberation of the Hebrew slaves in Exodus 3:7-10. And in our continued engagement with the multiple faces of poverty today, we see Christ’s suffering re-fracted in our world. But do we see the poor? Globally, the differences between the rich and poor grow bigger, millions starve and die unnoticed. While noting the variety of forms of poverty, Pope Leo cites Pope Francis in ‘Evangelii Gaudium’, Par. 212. “doubly poor are those women who endure situations of exclusion, mistreatment and violence, since they are frequently less able to defend their rights”. Yet we “witness among them impressive examples of daily heroism in defending and protecting their vulnerable families.”

Pope Leo highlights the inadequacy of the world view that sees success as merited by some and rejects the idea of “the deserving poor.” (Evangelii Gaudium, Par 14.) He challenges us to re-read the Gospel, to rediscover its care of the poor as central to our faith right now and then to act accordingly.



# Key Scripture Texts

*Select one or two to reflect on in silence.*



## Exodus 3:7-10

<sup>7</sup> Then the LORD said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, <sup>8</sup> and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. <sup>9</sup> And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. <sup>10</sup> Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt."

## Matthew 26:6-13 - Jesus Anointed at Bethany

<sup>6</sup> Now when Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, <sup>7</sup> a woman came up to him with an alabaster flask of very expensive ointment, and she poured it on his head as he reclined at table. <sup>8</sup> And when the disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, "Why this waste? <sup>9</sup> For this could have been sold for a large sum and given to the poor." <sup>10</sup> But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, "Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a beautiful thing to me. <sup>11</sup> For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. <sup>12</sup> In pouring this ointment on my body, she has done it to prepare me for burial. <sup>13</sup> Truly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her."

## Matthew 25:40

<sup>40</sup> And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters you did it to me.'

## Matthew 28:20

<sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

## Luke 1:53-55

... he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. <sup>54</sup> He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, <sup>55</sup> as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever."





## Image for Reflection

'Let Her Be.'

© Wayne Lacson Forte.

Oil and acrylic on canvas. 2024.

wayneforte.com



## Questions for Reflection

- What can you see in this painting?
- How does it make you feel?
- How does it inspire you to act?

## Group Discussion Points

- Identify three forms of poverty local to your church and community.
- Identify poverty in another country which we effect through our participation in world markets. e.g. food and lifestyle choices, minerals for mobiles and computers.
- How have the phrases 'deserving' and 'undeserving poor' been used in reporting in our country? What is the impact of these phrases and for whom?
- What action can you commit to over the coming week?
  - Set yourself a timescale to undertake that action.
  - Who else needs to be involved?
  - Decide when to review your action and its impact.

## Closing Prayer

**Loving God,**

*Now that we have finished our meeting,*

*enable us by your grace,*

*to go out and fulfil your purpose,*

*doing what you want us to do;*

*and to your name be the glory,*

*through Jesus Christ our Lord,*

**Amen.**

## Opening Prayer

**Lord,**

*We pray that through your vision of the kingdom here on earth,  
we may work for social justice.*

*We do not want to fly from your world but to engage within it.*

*Where there is injustice help us to find ways to eradicate it.*

*Where basic human rights are denied and life drains away,  
be with us to fight for equality and for dignity.*

*May ours be voices for change and compassion where none exist.*

*Stimulate our hearts to provide food, clothing and shelter  
for your children who have none.*

*Help us engage in a politics based upon gospel values,*

*serving you our Living God, through our service of your creation.*

*May our world be transformed into the paradise you first dreamed. **Amen.***

## Main Reflection

Pope Francis and Pope Leo return to the Scriptures to show the consistent pattern of God's love and compassion for humanity, but above all for the weak and oppressed. The psalmist sings of God as their friend and liberator who hears their cry and comes to their aid. (Psalm 34:7). The prophets Amos and Isaiah remind us of right prayer and sacrifice – religious practices, are meaningless if we ignore the immediate needs of the poor in front of us.

When God comes close in Jesus, he does so as a poor child of poor parents among the poor (2 Corinthians 8:9). He was born in a manger (Luke 2:7) and his parents could only afford to buy two pigeons for his presentation in the Temple. Jesus continued to be homeless as an adult unlike even the animals who have their dens. (Luke 9:58; Matthew 8:20). Jesus experienced the life of a migrant and asylum seeker (Matthew 2:13-15) fleeing Herod's persecution as a child. As a carpenter he lived by the work of his hands, owning no land or goods (Mark 6:3). He knew the radical hunger of a wanderer and itinerant teacher (Mark 2:23-28). Jesus' death on a cross is the last and most brutal experience of the poverty he shares with humanity (Philippians 2:3-7).

From the beginning of Jesus' ministry, he identifies himself as the anointed one that Isaiah prophesied to bring good news to the poor (Luke 4:18 echoing Isaiah 61:1). Jesus opens eyes, heals diseases, and raises the dead. (Luke 7:22). He places the sick, the marginalised and excluded at the heart of God's kingdom and in their rightful, God-given place. (Matthew 5:45; Luke 6:20).

When asked to summarise God's law, Jesus unites two ancient texts from Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18 "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might." And - "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." So emphatic is Jesus' teaching on the love of the poor that it becomes the sole criterion for the Last Judgement in Matthew 25:31-46 and the inspiration for the Church's 'Works of Mercy'. This focus on poverty becomes the central organising principle of the early church communities (cf. Acts 2; Galatians 2:10; James 2:14-17 and 1 John 3:17).

It takes the disciples a very long time to understand Jesus' message: that no one is outside the kingdom of God.



# Key Scripture Texts

*Select one or two to reflect on in silence.*

## Matthew 2:13-15 - The Flight to Egypt

<sup>13</sup> Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." <sup>14</sup> And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt <sup>15</sup> and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "Out of Egypt I called my son."

## Luke 7:22

<sup>22</sup> And he answered them, "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them.

## 2 Corinthians 8:9

<sup>9</sup> For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.

## James 2:14-17

<sup>14</sup> What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? <sup>15</sup> If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, <sup>16</sup> and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? <sup>17</sup> So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

## Mark - 2:23-28 - Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath

<sup>23</sup> One Sabbath he was going through the grainfields, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. <sup>24</sup> And the Pharisees were saying to him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" <sup>25</sup> And he said to them, "Have you never read what David did, when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him: <sup>26</sup> how he entered the house of God, in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him?" <sup>27</sup> And he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. <sup>28</sup> So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

## Luke 9:58

<sup>58</sup> And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."

## Philippians 2:3-7

<sup>3</sup> Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. <sup>4</sup> Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. <sup>5</sup> Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,] <sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup> but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.







## Image for Reflection

The Works of Mercy.

Jen Norton.

Artwork copyright © Jen Norton.

## Questions for Reflection

- What can you see in this painting?
- How does it make you feel?
- How does it inspire you to act?



## Group Discussion Points

- How would an outsider recognise your church or school's commitment to the poor?
- Reflect on how Jesus' words and practice affect your own awareness of the poor?
- Which of the seven 'Works of Mercy' do you need to prioritise in your community?
- What action can you commit to?
  - Set yourself a timescale to undertake that action.
  - Who else needs to be involved?
  - Decide when to review your action and its impact.

## Closing Prayer

Loving God,  
Now that we have finished our meeting,  
enable us by your grace,  
to go out and fulfil your purpose,  
doing what you want us to do;  
and to your name be the glory,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord,  
Amen.

## Opening Prayer

**Lord,**

*We pray that through your vision of the kingdom here on earth,  
we may work for social justice.*

*We do not want to fly from your world but to engage within it.*

*Where there is injustice help us to find ways to eradicate it.*

*Where basic human rights are denied and life drains away,  
be with us to fight for equality and for dignity.*

*May ours be voices for change and compassion where none exist.*

*Stimulate our hearts to provide food, clothing and shelter  
for your children who have none.*

*Help us engage in a politics based upon gospel values,*

*serving you our Living God, through our service of your creation.*

*May our world be transformed into the paradise you first dreamed. **Amen.***

## Main Reflection

On the third day after his election Pope Francis spoke of his desire for *"A church which is poor and for the poor."* He was re-stating the tradition expressed across the centuries from the Deacons of the earliest church, who died serving alongside the poorest, to the Religious and lay caring for the dying abandoned on the world's streets, to those now opening their homes to migrants and asylum seekers.

The care for the poor has always been at the core of the Church's essential identity. This is focused on the practical theology and preaching of the early Church Fathers. One quote from the martyred bishop of Alexandria, St John Chrysostom, will stand for the many: *"What advantage does Christ gain if the sacrificial table is laden with golden vessels, while he himself dies of hunger in the person of the poor? Feed the hungry first, and only afterward adorn the altar with what remains."*


Worship of God was empty if the community that gathered to pray did not already hold the poor and vulnerable, who image the incarnate One, at its heart. The mandate for this is Jesus' own open table fellowship and his insistence on the priority of the vulnerable in the concerns of his disciples. His sharpest teaching in the parable of the Last Judgement (Matthew 25:31-46) is repeated once again.

What Catholic Social Teaching now calls the universal destination of goods was mapped out in the earliest Christian generations. St Ambrose, Augustine's teacher, while bishop of Milan, states: *"What you give to the poor is not your property but theirs. Why have you appropriated what was given for common use?"* (Par. 43) The two great monastic traditions of St Benedict (480-547 AD) in the West and St Basil (329-379 AD) in the East both emphasise hospitality to the poor and care for the sick as the encounter of Christ within the poor (Rule of Benedict 53, 15). In this, they were being faithful to the words of Jesus: *"Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me."* (Matthew 25:40). These Monastic and Religious Orders that arose in times of war, famine, and persecution reach out to the excluded in charity but also in recognition that God has chosen to be with them. *"Blessed are you who are poor, for the Kingdom of God is yours."* Jesus uses the present tense. Those who free prisoners, often at the cost of their own freedom (John 15:13); who educate the poor (Luke 18:16); and who accompany migrants live not just alongside the poor but at the heart of the gospel. Today, the popular movements that address the structural causes of poverty and inequality throughout society, recognise that the underlying causes can only be changed by a wider collaboration and solidarity. Pope Leo recognises that this must also be worked out from within the institutional Church.



## Key Scripture Texts

*Select one or two to reflect on in silence.*



### Matthew 19:16-24

<sup>16</sup> And behold, a man came up to him, saying, "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?" <sup>17</sup> And he said to him, "Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments." <sup>18</sup> He said to him, "Which ones?" And Jesus said, "You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not bear false witness, <sup>19</sup> Honour your father and mother, and, you shall love your neighbour as yourself." <sup>20</sup> The young man said to him, "All these I have kept. What do I still lack?" <sup>21</sup> Jesus said to him, "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."

<sup>22</sup> When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. <sup>23</sup> And Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. <sup>24</sup> Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God."

### Acts 4:32-35

<sup>32</sup> Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. <sup>33</sup> And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. <sup>34</sup> There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold <sup>35</sup> and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

### Matthew 25:31-46

<sup>31</sup> "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. <sup>32</sup> Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. <sup>33</sup> And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. <sup>34</sup> Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. <sup>35</sup> For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, <sup>36</sup> I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' <sup>37</sup> Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? <sup>38</sup> And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? <sup>39</sup> And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' <sup>40</sup> And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you did it to me.'

<sup>41</sup> "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. <sup>42</sup> For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, <sup>43</sup> I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' <sup>44</sup> Then they also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?' <sup>45</sup> Then he will answer them, saying, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' <sup>46</sup> And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."







## Image for Reflection

Who Are My Mother, Brothers, Sisters?

Jen Norton.

Artwork copyright © Jen Norton.



## Questions for Reflection

- What can you see in this painting?
- How does it make you feel?
- How does it inspire you to act?

## Group Discussion Points

- Which groups in the Church today best witness to the care of the poor?
- Who are the poor where you live?
- How could they be met and helped by you and your church?
- What action can you commit to?
  - Set yourself a timescale to undertake that action.
  - Who else needs to be involved?
  - Decide when to review your action and its impact.

## Closing Prayer

*Loving God,  
Now that we have finished our meeting,  
enable us by your grace,  
to go out and fulfil your purpose,  
doing what you want us to do;  
and to your name be the glory,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord,  
Amen.*

## **Opening Prayer**

**Lord,**

*We pray that through your vision of the kingdom here on earth,  
we may work for social justice.*

*We do not want to fly from your world but to engage within it.*

*Where there is injustice help us to find ways to eradicate it.*

*Where basic human rights are denied and life drains away,  
be with us to fight for equality and for dignity.*

*May ours be voices for change and compassion where none exist.*

*Stimulate our hearts to provide food, clothing and shelter  
for your children who have none.*

*Help us engage in a politics based upon gospel values,*

*serving you our Living God, through our service of your creation.*

*May our world be transformed into the paradise you first dreamed. **Amen.***

## **Main Reflection**

Pope Leo now directs the focus more explicitly onto our own times. He sees the last 150 years of Catholic Social Teaching as a clearer critical focus on the political, social and economic realities explicitly from the perspective of the poor. The social Encyclicals since *Rerum Novarum* and the documents and debates of Vatican II have enabled a more radical response to Jesus' parable of Lazarus at the Rich Man's gate (Luke 16:19-31).

The preferential option for the poor, enunciated first in the South American Churches at Puebla and Medellin and in St. John Paul II's encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1987), becomes the core doctrinal statement summarising the Church's radical tradition in response to the poor.

Pope Leo cites the call of Pope Benedict XVI at the turn of a new millennium, in *Caritas in Veritate* (2009), to embed this concern in new economic networks capable of meeting national and international food crises regardless of their causes - natural or political.

Then Pope Leo clearly draws on his experience of missionary work in Latin America. He cites powerful texts from Pope Francis' Encyclicals and from the South American Bishops' meetings at Puebla, Medellin and at Aparecida in 2007.

He states that what needs to change are the systemic causes of poverty (*Evangelii Gaudium* 202, 2013) which consolidate a structure of sin, and which then sustain an economy that kills. Effectively this removes the poor from their rightful centrality in Church and society, limiting their existence to mere survival or premature death.


Pope Leo cites the closing text of the Aparecida Document: "The stark differences between rich and poor invite us to work with greater commitment to being disciples capable of sharing the table of life, the table of all the sons and daughters of the Father, a table that is open and inclusive, from which no one is excluded. We therefore reaffirm our preferential and evangelical option for the poor. (Bogota, 2007).

The second shift in our understanding of the challenges today in responding to the poor, lie in seeing the poor as agents of both theirs and our own change, rather than as passive victims of our sporadic and sometimes misaligned but well-intentioned charity. In the poor, the whole church can receive wisdom. The poor are both mirrors and resources of Christ's love and justice, so when we neglect the poor as our equals, we neglect Christ, his universal solidarity and his Kingdom.



## Key Scripture Texts

*Select one or two to reflect on in silence.*



### Luke 4:16-21

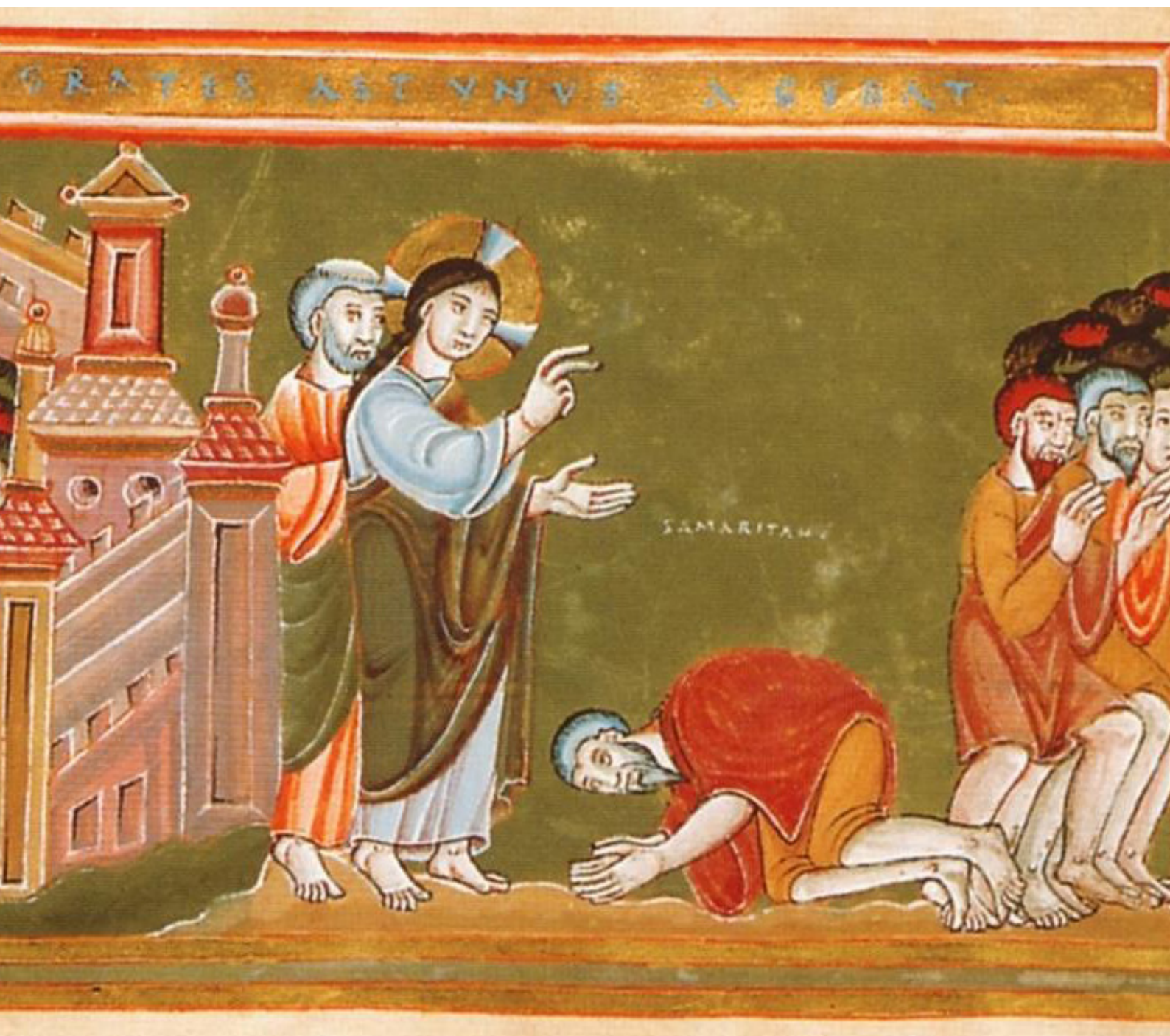
<sup>16</sup> And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. <sup>17</sup> And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, <sup>18</sup> “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, <sup>19</sup> to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.” <sup>20</sup> And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. <sup>21</sup> And he began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

### Luke 4:42-44

<sup>42</sup> And when it was day, he departed and went into a desolate place. And the people sought him and came to him, and would have kept him from leaving them, <sup>43</sup> but he said to them, “I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose.” <sup>44</sup> And he was preaching in the synagogues of Judea.

### Luke 16:19-31

<sup>19</sup> “There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. <sup>20</sup> And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, <sup>21</sup> who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man’s table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. <sup>22</sup> The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried, <sup>23</sup> and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. <sup>24</sup> And he called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.’ <sup>25</sup> But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. <sup>26</sup> And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.’ <sup>27</sup> And he said, ‘Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father’s house— <sup>28</sup> for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.’ <sup>29</sup> But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’ <sup>30</sup> And he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ <sup>31</sup> He said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.’”







## Image for Reflection

Cleansing of the Ten Lepers. c.1035-1040.  
*Illumination from the Codex Aureus  
 Epternacensis (an illuminated Golden  
 Gospel Book).*

## Questions for Reflection

- What can you see in this painting?
- How does it make you feel?
- How does it inspire you to act?

## Group Discussion Points

- What do you understand by the phrase “the preferential option for the poor”?
- How could your community organise itself to reflect this?
- What is the single most pressing obstacle to achieving this?
- What action can you commit to?
  - Set yourself a timescale to undertake that action.
  - Who else needs to be involved?
  - Decide when to review your action and its impact.

## Closing Prayer

*Loving God,  
 Now that we have finished our meeting,  
 enable us by your grace,  
 to go out and fulfil your purpose,  
 doing what you want us to do;  
 and to your name be the glory,  
 through Jesus Christ our Lord,  
 Amen.*

## **Opening Prayer**

**Lord,**

*We pray that through your vision of the kingdom here on earth,  
we may work for social justice.*

*We do not want to fly from your world but to engage within it.*

*Where there is injustice help us to find ways to eradicate it.*

*Where basic human rights are denied and life drains away,  
be with us to fight for equality and for dignity.*

*May ours be voices for change and compassion where none exist.*

*Stimulate our hearts to provide food, clothing and shelter  
for your children who have none.*

*Help us engage in a politics based upon gospel values,*

*serving you our Living God, through our service of your creation.*

*May our world be transformed into the paradise you first dreamed. **Amen.***

## **Main Reflection**

In the concluding chapter of 'Dilexi Te', Pope Leo once again reminds us of the Great Tradition of the Church in her care of the poor. And again, he foregrounds the journey of the South American Church since the Second Vatican Council as a model for wider change. Rooting its life and practice in Jesus' preaching of the Kingdom of God as a reality greater than any church structures and which is inclusive of all God's creatures is the turning point for the eradication of poverty. And this journey will always be marked by a radical turning to the poor who are "the flesh of Christ" and who become a way of liberation for them and us.

Pope Leo now commends this way of attending to the poor: of truly seeing and hearing them, and in sharing something of ourselves with them, as a guide to the whole Church. In doing so we will be evangelised by the poor and the experiences they have gained from encountering Christ in their midst. In the process we will be challenged to change and simplify our own lives. In this way, the Parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37 invites us to reflect on our attitude towards all who are wounded, and to "Go and do likewise" as a daily command rather than as an optional extra when we might have some time.

We should not see the poor as a category - as a social problem, but as a family matter. We are all children of God, and we are all responsible for God's family on earth. Christian love is capable of overcoming all barriers, travelling the distance, uniting strangers and reconciling enemies. Through our care of the poor, and in the many other acts we choose to do to help another person, we will always hear the words of Jesus: "I have loved you." (Revelation 3:9).


Throughout the centuries, the Scriptures have asked the hearts of Christians to love and carry out works of charity, as fertile seeds that never stop producing fruit. In this Great Tradition, we see an inseparable link between our faith and the way we treat the poor. This is not something that we can put off until tomorrow, until we first have all that we want and need. It is not something that we can speak to God about in rushed prayers. Mercy cannot wait when the cry of the poor is loud and clear. Our challenges continue to be the same challenges that faced the apostles and the early Church - can we see the face of Christ in everyone we meet? Are we ready to help those in need right now?

"Just as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you did it to me."  
(Matthew 25:40).



## Key Scripture Texts

*Select one or two to reflect on in silence.*



### Proverbs 22:9

Those who are generous are blessed, for they share their bread with the poor.

### Sirach 29:8-9

<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, be patient with someone in humble circumstances, and do not keep him waiting for your alms. <sup>9</sup> Help the poor for the commandment's sake, and in their need do not send them away empty-handed.

### Luke 12:33

<sup>33</sup> Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys.

### Luke 10:25-37

<sup>25</sup> And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" <sup>26</sup> He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" <sup>27</sup> And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself." <sup>28</sup> And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live." <sup>29</sup> But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?" <sup>30</sup> Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. <sup>31</sup> Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. <sup>32</sup> So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. <sup>33</sup> But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. <sup>34</sup> He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. <sup>35</sup> And the next day he took out two denarii[a] and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' <sup>36</sup> Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbour to the man who fell among the robbers?" <sup>37</sup> He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise."







## Image for Reflection

The Good Samaritan (after Delacroix).  
Vincent Van Gogh. 1890. Oil on Canvas.  
The Kröller-Müller Museum, Netherlands.



## Questions for Reflection

- What can you see in this painting?
- How does it make you feel?
- How does it inspire you to act?

## Group Discussion Points

- What does being a Good Samaritan mean to you in your local community?
- How does your Church reflect the Great Tradition?
- Who inspires you in their radical turning towards the poor?
- What action can you commit to?
  - Set yourself a timescale to undertake that action.
  - Who else needs to be involved?
  - Decide when to review your action and its impact.

## Closing Prayer

*Loving God,  
Now that we have finished our meeting,  
enable us by your grace,  
to go out and fulfil your purpose,  
doing what you want us to do;  
and to your name be the glory,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord,  
Amen.*

# Complete list of Bible References used in 'Dilexi Te'.

## Old Testament References

- Exodus 3:7-8,10:** God reveals himself to Moses in the burning bush, hearing the cry of his people in Egypt and promising deliverance.
- Exodus 23:4-5:** The law on treating one's enemy with mercy.
- Leviticus 12:8:** The offering of the poor, which Mary and Joseph made at Jesus' presentation.
- Leviticus 19:18:** The command to love one's neighbour as oneself.
- Deuteronomy 6:5:** The command to love the Lord God with all one's heart, soul, and might.
- Deuteronomy 15:9:** Citing guilt that comes from being unresponsive to the cry of the poor.
- Judges 3:15:** God raises up a deliverer when the Israelites cry out to him.
- Psalms 34:7:** God is presented as the friend and liberator of the poor.
- Proverbs 19:17:** Giving to the poor is giving to the Lord.
- Isaiah 58:8:** A promise to those who give generously to others.
- Isaiah 61:1:** The prophecy of bringing good news to the poor, which Jesus quotes in Luke 4.

## New Testament References

- Matthew 2:13-15:** The Holy Family's flight to Egypt.
- Matthew 5:45:** God's generosity is shown to all.
- Matthew 8:20:** Jesus identifies with the poor.
- Matthew 19:21:** The rich young man is challenged to give to the poor.
- Matthew 25:6-13:** Anointing at Bethany highlights the constant presence of the poor.
- Matthew 25:13:** The woman's loving act is remembered.
- Matthew 25:31-46:** The Parable of the Last Judgment emphasises care for those in need.
- Matthew 28:20:** Jesus promises his enduring presence.
- Mark 2:23-28:** The disciples glean grain, referencing a practice for the poor.
- Mark 6:3:** Jesus is identified as a carpenter.
- Mark 12:29-31:** The Great Commandment to love God and neighbour is given.
- Mark 15:22:** Jesus' crucifixion outside the city identifies him with outcasts.
- Luke 1:52-53:** Mary's Canticle speaks of God exalting the humble and filling the hungry.
- Luke 2:7:** No room in the inn for the Holy Family.



<b>Luke 2:22-24:</b>	Offering of the poor is made at Jesus' presentation.
<b>Luke 4:14-30:</b>	Jesus' mission to bring good news to the poor and rejection at Nazareth.
<b>Luke 6:20:</b>	The poor are called blessed as the kingdom of God is theirs.
<b>Luke 6:38:</b>	The principle of reciprocity in giving is mentioned.
<b>Luke 7:22:</b>	Jesus' actions demonstrate his love for the sick and poor.
<b>Luke 9:58:</b>	Jesus notes he has no home unlike the animals.
<b>Luke 14:12-14:</b>	Jesus encourages inviting the poor to meals.
<b>Luke 16:25:</b>	The Parable of the rich man and Lazarus and the fate of those who ignore the poor.
<b>John 1:18:</b>	God's love is revealed through the Word.
<b>Acts 6:1-6:</b>	Deacons are instituted to care for widows.
<b>Romans 11:15:</b>	The reconciliation of the world is mentioned.
<b>1 Corinthians 1:26:</b>	Paul notes the humble composition of the community.
<b>2 Corinthians 8:9:</b>	Jesus' voluntary poverty for our sake is noted.
<b>2 Corinthians 9:7:</b>	God blesses cheerful giving.
<b>Galatians 2:1-10:</b>	Church leaders emphasise remembering the poor.
<b>Philippians 2:7:</b>	Jesus' self-emptying is described.
<b>James 2:2-4:</b>	Favouritism towards the rich in the assembly is condemned.
<b>James 2:14-17:</b>	The necessity of good works alongside faith is stressed.
<b>James 5:3-5:</b>	James criticises the rich who exploit others.
<b>1 John 3:17:</b>	Failing to help a needy brother or sister is a failure to love.
<b>1 John 4:9:</b>	God's love is shown in sending his Son.
<b>1 John 4:12, 16:</b>	God is present when we love one another.
<b>1 John 4:20:</b>	The connection between loving God and loving one's brother or sister is made.
<b>Revelation 3:8-9:</b>	These verses are the source of Dilexi Te's title, "I have loved you."

## **Further Reading and Resources:**

Turning Tables: Scripture and Social Action Toolkit - [www.godwhospeaks.uk/turning-tables-a-toolkit-for-scripture-and-social-action/](http://www.godwhospeaks.uk/turning-tables-a-toolkit-for-scripture-and-social-action/)

Poverty in the Bible - [www.godwhospeaks.uk/poverty-in-the-bible/](http://www.godwhospeaks.uk/poverty-in-the-bible/)

Good Work and the Bible - [www.godwhospeaks.uk/good-work/](http://www.godwhospeaks.uk/good-work/)

Law and Dignity in the Bible - [www.godwhospeaks.uk/law-and-mercy-in-the-scriptures/](http://www.godwhospeaks.uk/law-and-mercy-in-the-scriptures/)

Justice - [www.godwhospeaks.uk/justice/](http://www.godwhospeaks.uk/justice/)

Disability in the church - [www.godwhospeaks.uk/disability-in-the-church-community/](http://www.godwhospeaks.uk/disability-in-the-church-community/)

Social Justice Posters - [www.godwhospeaks.uk/posters-for-schools/#sjs](http://www.godwhospeaks.uk/posters-for-schools/#sjs)

Scripture and Citizenship Posters - [www.godwhospeaks.uk/posters-for-schools/#sc](http://www.godwhospeaks.uk/posters-for-schools/#sc)

The God who Speaks – [www.godwhospeaks.uk/](http://www.godwhospeaks.uk/)

Love the Stranger: A Catholic response to Migrants and Refugees - [www.cbcew.org.uk/love-the-stranger/](http://www.cbcew.org.uk/love-the-stranger/)

Render unto Caesar: Perspectives on taxation from Catholic social thought and teaching - [www.cbcew.org.uk/render-unto-caesar/](http://www.cbcew.org.uk/render-unto-caesar/)

Remember Me: A Catholic Approach to Criminal Justice - [www.cbcew.org.uk/remember-me/](http://www.cbcew.org.uk/remember-me/)

Do Justice - <https://dojustice.co.uk/>

Photo credits: Pexel and Unsplash for cover montage, Pexel for pages 3,4,5,29,32.





Author: Fleur Dorrell.

*A God who Speaks* resource for the Biblical Apostolate of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England & Wales.

## **Space for Notes**







**"Anyone who says they  
love God and has no  
compassion for the  
needy is lying".**

***1 John 4:20a***

