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Spiritual Poverty

“Happy are those who know they are spiritually poor; the kingdom of heaven belongs to them (Matthew 5: 3).”

People want happiness, but few know what true happiness is.

There are those who live an unhappy life though they have all kinds of wealth; while there are those who are happy though they have nothing.

There are the blessed rich who have piled up wealth properly and given favors to their neighbors; while there are the unhappy poor who have lived only for themselves and squandered their fortune.

The way to reach true happiness is to gain entry into the Kingdom of heaven by loving our neighbors until we enjoy the spiritual poverty.

Confessions of a Successful

Businesswoman: “I am Unhappy.”

One day a decent middle-aged woman came to Kkottongnae to donate a big sum of money. She behaved very humbly and said she would be grateful if we accepted the money. We asked how it was that she could be so humble while donating such a large amount of

money. She then answered that she thought she would become happier in this way and implored us again to accept it.

The middle-aged woman was a successful businesswoman, working as the president of a medium-sized company. She said she had made a lot of money in an enviable position but she had never been happy. She felt that she was living in a way that was not pleasant for her and kept asking herself why she was so unhappy. After trying to figure out the reason, she finally realized why.

She was thrust into the business world without any experience, forced to take over responsibility for the family after her husband lost his job and became incompetent, shortly after their marriage. She found, after years of all kinds of hardships, that she could be successful in growing the business by competing against other businessmen. However, this selfish life of working only for herself and her family left her with a feeling of unhappiness and a sense of emptiness and loss when she had reached her middle age.

She realized that she had felt happiness only once during her marriage life, which was at the beginning when she was very poor. At the time, she lived in a run-down rented



The statue of Sacred Heart of Jesus that stands at the foot of Mt. Sosokri.

house, but could feel happy with just a ray of warm sunshine on her forehead and back, taking care of her three-year-old daughter, doing laundry, and waving good-bye to her husband going to work. Those were the days when she lived a happy but poor life owning nothing, while now she lives an unhappy rich life despite owning everything.

The Definition of Poverty

When we talk about poverty, we talk about both material and spiritual poverty. Spiritual poverty refers to having an attitude of not having attachment to material goods by standing aloof from them.

In the Old Testament era, poverty was understood as a deficit and was treated as an unhappy state which should not exist in the human world. However, in the New Testament era, Jesus came to this world and proclaimed 'happy poverty': "Happy are those who know they are spiritually poor; the kingdom of heaven belongs to them." Happy poverty, which is also called a spiritual poverty, is the poverty of people who are bound to only God and who give everything to their neighbors, not just being aloof from wealth.

Even in the history of the church, there have been numerous saints and religious orders who have lived poor lives

The Poverty of St. Francis

St. Francis was one who best kept a spiritually poor life, and he liked the Old Testament expression the 'Poor people of Yahweh' and enjoyed praying as one of them. 'Poor people' are those whose only hope is God and those who cannot live without God. So they put all

their hope and faith in the Messiah, waiting for Him through all kinds of hardships and suffering.

A disciple asked his teacher, Francis: "What is poverty?" He answered: "The poverty of our Jesus Christ is poverty." The poverty of Jesus Christ is summed up as Jesus of Bethlehem, Jesus of Golgotha, and Jesus in the Eucharist.

Since He loved men so much, Jesus of Bethlehem came to this world leaving behind the prestige as the owner of this world, to be born as the poorest and weakest baby in a humble stable. Jesus of Golgotha is the Jesus of sacrifice, giving his life on the cross as the lowliest and most miserable being in appearance in order to forgive and atone for our sins. Jesus in the Eucharist alludes to the impoverished appearance of Jesus who willingly changed Himself into a piece of bread and became food for humankind, locked in a shrine because of His love for men.

In this way, Jesus, who lacks nothing, became the poorest because of his love for us.

Our Ancestors Who Lived Poor

A learned man in our past history lived poorly enjoying honest poverty, and valued filial piety toward parents. The teaching on filial piety clearly states about the duty of children when parents are sick as follows: 'When a parent is sick and cannot eat, the children should skip a meal together with the parent. Do your best to cure your parent's illness by seeking every best-known medicine and doctor. Do not show a look of happiness even if you have some good news, and fulfill all of your filial duties by even selling everything you have. Once you have done everything you could do

during his/her life, mourn as you beat your chest and ground, confessing that you were a sinner who had not done all the duties due a parent after he/she died.'

Our ancestors who reproached themselves as sinners even after doing their best for their parents are those who practiced filial duties with true spiritual poverty.

The Spirituality of Poverty of Kkottongnae

Fr. Oh, who founded Kkottongnae, has been carrying out spiritual poverty as a father to the poor for the last 30 years with all his life. He encourages the religious and volunteer workers to live a poor life and teaches as follows:

"Spiritual poverty is the state where we feel deficiency because there's nothing more to give out, no matter how much we would like to. Jesus achieved spiritual poverty first since He gave His life for men and wanted to give more to His people, observing His own word, 'There is no greater love than taking one's own life for a friend.' Like this, we can live in blissful poverty when we are finally satisfied by fulfilling our needs for love, once we have loved our neighbors until we feel spiritually poor."

Spiritual Cure of Grandfather Who Was Suffering from a Fever of Unknown Origin

There was an old patient with a high temperature of 40 degrees Celsius.

A volunteer worker took care of him, treating him with antibiotics and ringer's solution to reduce his fever, but the high fever lasted over one month despite all efforts of the worker. One day the grandfather, who was dying with fever, told the volunteer worker like this:

"Brother, it seems as though my illness is all gone when you come to my side." He held his hand and did not let it go. The volunteer worker was embarrassed and felt sorry, reproaching himself for helplessly watching the old man die, unable to help him recover. He felt a big burden rather than pleasure when he heard the words of thanks from him because he thought he could have done better with the huge responsibility of nursing the old man, even though he actually did his best in his own way. At the time, it was uncertain whether he read the worker's thoughts or not. However, the grandfather repeated the same words every-day, and mysteriously his fever would go down, the breathing difficulty was alleviated, and the pain in his heart disappeared whenever he was holding the volunteer worker's hand. The grandfather, who said exactly the same words of thanks even on the day of his death, seemed unaware of anything suffering from high fever but he knew everything. He realized that he would die soon, and he knew that the volunteer worker felt guilty about the bad result, feeling sorry for not curing his illness and not taking care of him better. The grandfather, who realized that the volunteer worker took care of him without rest in the true spirit of poverty, came to reconcile with the world and forgive his family, overcoming the wound from being forsaken, and even promised to donate his eyes before his death.

Just as this shows us, when a person gives one's all doing her/his best until she/he reaches deficiency, she/he can achieve spiritual poverty: the person receiving the love will become a happy person living with forgive-

ness, reconciliation, and love through the spiritual healing.

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This article is a summary from a homily of Fr. Oh Woong-Jin saying Mass on September 24, 1990

Spiritual Poverty

Poverty is poverty. But we have to figure out how the poverty occurred. The true poverty of God is the poverty which Jesus Christ showed us through his words, power, life, pains, and death. However, worldly poverty is the state of being deprived of everything due to pains, mistakes and sins.

True poverty is the spiritual poverty that we can attain when we give out everything from our body and mind, to even our life. It is the state of mind where nothing ? not shape or life ? but spiritual poverty is left after giving out body and blood as our bread and wine. This is the definition of true poverty.

Jesus Christ is the poorest person. There is nothing left but an expression of spiritual poverty after giving out everything to us in Him: Jesus Christ lives within us without any shape since He gave out everything. If He had not given everything, Jesus Christ could not have been living within us.

A person who lives for oneself cannot take part in the poverty of Christ. Such a person cannot live in the Kingdom of God. However, a person who does not live for oneself but gives his/her life to God's words, can be a spiritually poor person like Jesus Christ. Such a person will be reborn as an eternal being above time and space like Jesus Christ. Therefore, such a person already has a place in the Kingdom of God.

However, poverty exists in this world. Worldly poverty is a state where people who like to be engaged in owning and ruling are ruled and owned instead, so it is a

state where people cannot offer anything. Worldly poverty is a miserable state, also called absolute poverty as it is developed from greed, sin and death. Therefore, worldly poverty comes from the end of disaster, while the poverty in the Gospels is the state of poverty where nothing but spiritual poverty leaves like the decisive result of Jesus Christ's mercy, who sacrificed everything—body, mind, and life—until He died on the cross. This is true poverty.

True poverty is in the place where people offer their life and their life is taken for God's words. Those who offer their life for God's words are spiritually poor people. So, the poverty in the Gospels is the true spiritual poverty which is in those who offer their life for God's words.

To deliver this world from evil, everybody should become spiritually poor. If we are not spiritually poor, we cannot enter the Kingdom of God. Therefore, we ourselves should become spiritually poor to serve as a model to teach people in the world to be spiritually poor: When we become spiritually poor, people in the world would become spiritually poor as well through us.

We never live by bread alone, but by God's words. God's words are love, and the love is the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ. If we do not eat and drink the holy body and blood, we cannot become spiritually poor.

Jesus Christ said, 'Nobody can come to me if they do not eat my body and drink my blood.' People who eat and drink the body and blood of Jesus Christ will be spiritually poor. Jesus Christ stayed a spiritually poor person by giving us everything including even His

flesh and blood, and came to sit on the right side of God through the spiritual poverty. Likewise, we also have to give our body and blood to the worldly poor people who have nobody to depend on and no strength to beg for food. In turn, they will also live a life of giving body and blood to their neighbors like Jesus Christ and will be truly poor and finally enter the Kingdom of God.

Accordingly, when worldly poverty disappears and the world is full of the perfect spiritually poor, the Kingdom of God will be realized with the spiritual poverty of the Gospels in this world.



From 10 o' clock in the morning
to 4 o' clock in the afternoon,
a lucid halo of the Sun was
shining upon the site of the new
house for the homeless where
people were celebrating the
completion of the house on
September 8, 1983.