

**Mass with the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception**

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Reverend Fathers, Knights and Ladies of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ: in an audience with representatives of the communications media at the beginning of his Petrine ministry, the Holy Father spoke about the reason for his choosing the name of Francis. He explained that, once it became clear that he was to be elected, a cardinal from Brazil gave him a hug and said: "Don't forget the poor!"¹

That got him thinking about the poor, which led him to think of St. Francis of Assisi, who had a great love for the poor, and so he chose that name for the way he wanted to be known as the Successor to St. Peter. The Holy Father then shared one of his great hopes for the Church moving forward when he said, "How I would like a Church which is poor and for the poor!"²

Unlike some leaders who make promises and set a vision for their future, yet fail to make good on those plans, Pope Francis has remained

true to this vision throughout his papacy. He has demonstrated his great love for the poor on many occasions, not just with his words, but, in very moving ways, with his actions as well. He has challenged Catholics and other Christians throughout the world to understand that we must be ever mindful of the needs of those less fortunate and to reach out to them with the love and mercy of Jesus Christ.

The love for the poor, in addition to his desire that the Church be poor, does not mean that the Holy Father is opposed to having wealth, as some might interpret by his words and actions. In one of his daily homilies at the chapel of Casa Santa Marta, the pope said that “riches are for the common good, for everyone. And if the Lord gives them to one person it is so that they are used for the good of all, not for oneself, not so they are closed in one’s heart, which then becomes corrupt and sad.”³

He warns about how riches “have the ability to seduce, to take us to a seduction and make us believe that we are in a paradise on earth.”⁴ We must practice a detachment from all of the gifts that the Lord has given to us, especially monetary wealth, and see them as means by which we can exercise that love for the poor which he so greatly desires.

This is what lies at the heart of the Gospel that we have just heard. When Jesus warns that “it will be hard for one who is rich to enter the Kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 19:23), He is speaking about how riches can enslave us to where they become an idol to the point that we close our eyes to others and to God, looking only to ourselves and what we want. The same could be said for any unhealthy attachment that we might have in our lives, but money is singled out because of its particularly seductive power when used inappropriately. Willful separation from God in this life can have lasting effects into eternity if we do not break free from those unhealthy attachments.

There is a connection between this passage and the one found in the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew’s Gospel, where Jesus speaks about how we will be judged based on how we have responded to the needs of others, telling us: “whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me” (Matthew 25:40). The connection here is that our generosity with the poor and those in need is to be rooted in the awareness of our solidarity with others in Christ. When we serve others, we are serving Christ in them, and we are to see them as brothers and sisters.

In a particular way, members of this Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem focus with great attention on our solidarity with those in the Holy Land and in the Middle East, seeing in them, especially fellow Christians, true brothers and sisters in Christ. Recent events have highlighted the urgent need that they have in the face of so many challenges.

In this year's Easter Message from the Grand Master of the Order, Cardinal Edwin O'Brien reflected on this point with these words:

From the empty Sepulchre, the Pope seems to suggest, flow the baptismal graces that join all Christians one to another, and requiring and enabling us to participate in the suffering and death of Jesus which is being continued these very days in the genocide of Christians of every denomination at the hands of extremists. How acutely do we who truly belong to that land feel the pain of those modern day saints? Do we share a real sense of baptismal solidarity with them and how do we express that?⁵

Certainly, we express that in the many forms of financial support which aid in the good work that is being done to support Christians in the Holy Land. But it is good for us to pause and reflect from time to time, not

just on *what* we do and to *what* we support through these programs. We must never lose sight of *whom* we support. They are not just anonymous faces or numbers, they are our brothers and sisters, as close to us in faith as those with whom we come into contact each and every day. When we see others from that perspective, we will be more willing to share from the resources that we have out of love for them in Christ Jesus, whose Death and Resurrection applies just as much to them as it does for us.

Let us continue to keep these brothers and sisters close to us in our prayers as we strive to do all that we are able in order to assist them in their time of need. The Lord has been generous with each of us in so many ways. Let us share the fruits of His generosity with all who face any form of poverty or need so that all of God's children will experience His goodness through the love that He has called us to live.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Pope Francis, *Audience to Representatives of the Communications Media*, 16 March 2013.

² Ibid.

³ Pope Francis, *Daily Homily*, 25 May 2015.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Cardinal Edwin O'Brien, *A Thought for the Easter Season*, 12 April 2015.