

# **'When did we see you homeless?'**

We're not saying Jesus was a plagiarist. It's just that he emphasized some items that are also in the Old Testament.

Let's start with Isaiah 58:6-7. The Lord says: "Is this not, rather, the fast that I choose? ... Sharing your bread with the hungry, bringing the afflicted and the homeless into your house; Clothing the naked when you see them, and not turning your back on your own flesh?"

And compare it with Matthew 25:34-36: "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. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.'"

The second quote, as you probably know, is from "The Judgment of Nations." The judgment of us.

## **The to-do list for us**

So! It's right there on Jesus' to-do list – his for us to-do list.

You know this, too. You've heard it countless times. Something to eat and drink. A safe place to stay. Clothes. Care. A visit.

"When did we see you, Lord?" the "goats" ask.

"Are you kidding me?!" the Lord answers. Well, not that precisely. But his point was (and is) "selective blindness" is no excuse.

“That was you, Lord? Oh my gosh, I wish you had said something.”

But, of course, he did. And we hear it time and again as a Gospel reading at Mass. Well, it's read. Proclaimed. Listened to is another matter.

Relax. No one is calling you Grumpy Goat Man or that Ba-a-a-a-d Goat Woman. We all need reminders. We all need to stop, look and listen. (This phrase plagiarized from a longtime railroad-crossing warning.)

And it helps to hear it repackaged, as in the parable of the good Samaritan.

Wow, did that guy blaze through a number of items on the to-do list by helping the fellow who had been beaten up and robbed.

## **Little and big ways**

Wow, can we do a lot by doing many little things to help those who are homeless – while also supporting the big things that help, too. This isn't “either/or.” Not “either I help in little ways or in big ways.”

What's a big way? Backing appropriate, compassionate legislative action. Donating to grassroots causes and organizations that are addressing the issues. Learning more about homelessness not just in our own community but in our state and throughout the country and world. Finding ways to assist the many Christ-like organizations, associations, apostolates, societies, ministries, religious orders and diocesan services helping those who have no home.

And what's a little way?

Many of those who work in this field say handing someone money isn't the best choice. (Among those who say that giving directly is all right is Pope Francis.) Still, coming face to

face with a person asking for help on the sidewalk or outside your car at a stoplight, you want to do something. Give something.

Maybe it's having a couple of protein bars tucked in a pocket. Or a few pairs of new socks with you in the car. A gift card for a local fast-food restaurant or grocery store. A smile, a nod, a wave. A sign of recognition because you do see him or her.

Want more suggestions for helping, big or little? Just click, click, click. Go online. Begin that research. Learn from those who know – those who work with the homeless, those who have been homeless.

Don't have Internet access? Ask a member of the St. Vincent de Paul Society in your parish or diocese. They know. Boy, do they know.

## **Points to consider**

1. It well may be – but unknown to you – a friend, coworker, neighbor or fellow parishioner has a family member who's homeless. It well may be you have an immediate or extended family member living in a shelter or on the street.

Why? For many reasons, often ones with no simple solution. Or a solution – including taking that person into one's own home – that lasts only for a time.

You've heard the causes of homelessness: job loss, savings wiped out by a catastrophic illness, drug or alcohol abuse, mental illness and more. Each individual, a story. A person. A set of needs. With an age range from infant to elder. All races. All creeds and no creed. All – referring again to Matthew 25 – Jesus.

2. Two more quotes from Scripture:

“Pay attention to this, you foolish and senseless people, who have eyes and do not see, who have ears and do not hear” (Jer 5:21).

And, “This poor one cried out and the Lord heard, and from all his distress he saved him” (Ps 34:7).

We can see more “homeless” in our midst if we expand the definition. There are those who have a roof over their heads but no longer a home, no longer “their home.”

- It’s the young co-worker who moved to another city or state to take that new job.
- It’s the patient spending day after day in an unfamiliar and frightening world of a hospital or nursing home.
- It’s the formerly healthy individual who’s now homebound or bedbound.
- It’s the child starting midyear at a new school after the family moved.
- It’s the one who’s grieving the death of a loved one. Now living on the same planet but in a different world.
- It’s the children doing their best to adjust to mom and dad’s divorce.
- It’s so many people, facing so many challenges because their lives have become unmoored. Not cut loose and free-floating but cut to the quick and sinking.

3. Pray – as a parish, as a family, as one person. Pray for those in need and that you – as a parish, as a family, as one person – have the eyes to see, and the heart to help Jesus.

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## **‘Look at him as a person’**

From a March 2017 interview of Pope Francis in the monthly Milan-based street magazine *Scarp de’ tenis* (Tennis Shoes).

“There are many arguments to justify oneself when you do not

give alms. 'But what, I give money and then he spends it on a glass of wine?' If a glass of wine is the only happiness he has in life, that is fine.

"Instead, ask yourself what you do secretly. What 'happiness' do you seek in private? Or, on the contrary to him, you are more fortunate, with a house, a wife, children, which leads you to say, 'Take care of him yourselves.'

"Help is always right.

"Certainly, it is not a good thing just to throw a few coins at the poor. The gesture is important, helping those who ask, looking them in the eyes. ... Tossing the money without looking in the eyes, that is not the gesture of a Christian.

"Teaching in charity is not about offloading one's own sense of guilt, but it is touching, looking at our inner poverty that the Lord understands and saves. Because we all have inner poverty. ...

"It is possible to see a homeless person and look at him as a person, or as if he were a dog. And they are aware of this different way of looking at them. ...

"It is very hard to put oneself in other people's shoes, because often we are enslaved by our own selfishness.

"At a first level, we can say that people prefer to think about their own problems without wanting to see the suffering and difficulties of others. There is another level, though. Putting oneself in the shoes of others means having a great capacity for understanding, to understand the moment and difficult situations. ...

"If we think of the existences that are often made up of loneliness, then putting ourselves in the shoes of others means service, humility, magnanimity, which is also the expression of a need.

“I need someone to put himself in my shoes. ... How often I come across people who, after having sought comfort in a Christian, be they a layperson, a priest, a nun, a bishop, say to me, ‘Yes, they listened, but they didn’t understand.’

“Understanding means putting oneself in other people’s shoes.”