

Listen, my dear people: it was those who are poor according to the world that God chose, to be rich in faith and to be the heirs to the kingdom which he promised to those who love him.
Words from the second reading.

When St Teresa of Calcutta was invited to Harvard University to give the commencement address, she began by reading their invitation to her, which said something like this: *We invite you, Mother Teresa, as the most well-known citizen of India - one of the poorest countries in the world - to share your wisdom with us here in America, one of the richest countries in the world.* And Mother said, *That's just not true. India is not a poor country. India is a rich country. India has many kinds of spiritual riches. And America is not a rich country. America is a poor country. Any country that slaughters its own unborn children is a desperately poor country.* The audience at Harvard that day were uncomfortable and embarrassed, totally silent. We, too, should be silent and listening, embarrassed and uncomfortable. The poor need our charity, and the first and greatest act of charity we can give according to St Thomas Aquinas, is to lead our neighbours to the truth, to speak *the truth in love* as St Paul put it. Truth and love, clarity and charity – we seldom practice both together. Jesus always did.

In today's second reading, St James criticizes those who discriminate against the poor. The Church teaches that almsgiving, which means all kinds of charity to the poor, is an essential part of the Gospel, not an optional extra for a few activists. There are many ways to discriminate against the poor. One of the most neglected ways in which we discriminate against the poor is by simply not paying attention to their existence and their needs and our ability to help them, often in very simple and easy ways, such as by donating our extra stuff to charity shops or Help the Homeless. And we all have lots of extra "stuff." Another way we ignore and discriminate is by ignoring the spiritually poor and their spiritual needs. According to Mother Teresa, some of the poorest people in our society are people with comfortable houses, jobs, and bank accounts. God's salvation is for everyone. Isaiah prophesied in our poetic first reading that *the eyes of the blind would be opened, the ears of the deaf unsealed... and the tongues of the dumb sing for joy.* Even as we speak the prophecy is being fulfilled around the world, through Jesus our saviour, like water gushing in the desert. And he needs us to use our gifts to realise his plan to bring good news to the poor.

Mother Teresa loved to say, *God cannot be outdone in generosity.* But God's plan is to give the world His gifts through us, his children. He brings about justice through honest lawyers and

wise voters. He gives food to the hungry through those who go on the soup run with St Teresa's community, as well as farmers who grow the food. He gives sight to the blind through medical technology and the touch language of braille. Are these works our works or God's works? It is like asking whether it was the obedient soldiers or the general who won the battle; was it the footballers or their manager who won the trophy? All good work is God's work, even when we accomplish it. We are his instruments, his tools. Was it the saw that cut the wood, or was it the carpenter? Both. God is the first cause, the giver of *all good giving and every perfect gift*; but he does not ignore and bypass his children and do the job all by himself, for the same reason your house staff don't do your prep for you. He's training us; he's cultivating us; he's growing us as farmers grow crops. He gives us spiritual gifts through our soul – and we must use our spiritual gifts by doing spiritual work. That work is called prayer. The monks called their prayer the *opus Dei*; the work of God. Jesus asks us to pray, to be real links in the charity chain. Link up with God's activity in the world and your life will take on new meaning. Pray and live St Francis' prayer: *Lord, make me an instrument of your peace: where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; and where there is sadness, joy.* The Lord will most certainly answer this prayer every single day of your life if you promise to work through him and with him.

I have three pieces of homework for you, or prep as we say at Downside. First, look at our world. Look at all the work to be done. Don't close your eyes to human needs: look for them. Look into the hearts of your family members and your neighbours in house; look at their sufferings and their needs. And then, second bit of prep, open the eyes of your heart and your conscience and look at your Lord face to face; open your heart to the heart of the one who so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son to save it. And then, finally, look at yourself and your deepest identity. If you are a baptized Catholic, you are part of his Body. He made you to do his work. Whatever good you do, he does it through you. Offer it to him: all your prayers, works, joys, and sufferings of every day.

The last words go to Mother Teresa, aka St Teresa, whose saint's day was last Wednesday:
Be the living expression of God's kindness; kindness in your face, kindness in your eyes, kindness in your smile.