

The religious points the way. He shows how these present ruins can be made the foundations of a new city of God. Not all are called to live that life without any property or ownership; but all are called to live according to that self-same spirit. And on this condition alone will a new social order arise. 'The poor you have always with you'—and they may be the leaven for a rising Christian social order.

THE EDITOR

BLESSED ARE THE POOR

After these things, Jesus went over the sea of Galilee, which is that of Tiberius . . . (St John 6, 1).

LET us think of these five barley loaves and two fishes. As you know our blessed Lord and Apostles had nothing. You will remember when our blessed Lord began to preach the redemption of the world he took care to begin at the beginning, the first thing necessary—'Blessed are the poor in spirit'. Religious life begins too with that poverty. Until that is right we have not begun right. We are in a sense not bound to pay more than other people (ten Commandments)—but we are more bound. For instance I might be bound to pay £50 to someone from whom I had stolen it. I might say, 'Well I am such a wicked person that I will take a vow to pay it back'. I should not be bound to pay £60 because I'd taken a vow to pay, but I am more bound to pay the £50. Because I am bound in justice and also by vow. A great number of people can't see that.

All the world is bound in justice to poverty, chastity and obedience. Not by vow, of course. Now if we, being bound more, commit a sin against poverty, chastity or obedience, we also commit a sacrilege, so that we are obliged because we have taken a vow. The primary thing is the poverty of our state. Now this is a very important thing, very simple. Everybody is obliged to poverty (of spirit). The world does not think so. Poverty is so necessary that though a king or a queen led a very good life and there was a chance of their being canonised and their cause was up in Rome, there would be the duty of showing whether that king or queen were poor. If it could be proved that they had *not* the virtue of poverty they would not be canonised. When you read the lives of the saints you will always find a chapter on their spirit of poverty. Riches, as such, cannot go to heaven. Our Lord said 'Woe to the rich' (Luke vi, 24). 'Woe' therefore means you are going to hell. It is not pleasant to read this part of the gospel. But I have no commission from God to leave out parts because they are unpalatable. That is our Lord's teaching. Imagine Father Vincent saying

'Oh I won't read that part'. Of course it would be terrible if our Lord could say of religious—or groups of religious—'You are rich!' That would mean you are going to hell. Woe to the rich. Rich individuals, rich communities. . . . That would be a fact.

Now we begin with that, and analyse it, and calmly see what it means. So far as I can make out we must now begin to ask what our Lord means. He evidently meant something. He meant the rich are going to hell. Now you have calmly to face these things, and see what they mean. Our Lord never said, for instance, Woe to generals in the Army, Woe to farmers or Woe to foremen—or Woe to kings and queens. But what he did say was Woe to rich generals, woe to rich farmers, woe to rich foremen, woe to rich kings and queens, woe to rich religious Orders—it was woe to the riches. The *Eternal Wisdom* is very careful what he says. It sounds too dreadful to hear people who think he must either not have thought what he said or he did not mean what he said. He means what he says. Woe to the rich. He did not specify any particular group—for instance a rich shoemaker, or a rich cook. That is the trouble. What did he mean? I think he meant: Woe to those who have much more than is necessary for their work in this world. You understand, as St Paul says, those who have no work in this world should not eat. That is a very simple thing. The first condition of union with God is that you shall work. Not that you shall pray. If you do not work it is suicide. A community that prays and does not work is not much use to the world. Our primary duty in this world is not so much to pray as to eat—because if we do not eat we shall be committing suicide. Now what I think our Lord condemns is having far more than is necessary for our work. The works in the world are very various—for instance, the work of those in the Infirmary, their work is to suffer their loneliness or whatever it may be, and it is our duty to see that they suffer *as little as possible*.

Don't say 'Thank God we have a saint upstairs—we can neglect her and she will offer it all up to God'. The Infirmary will require a number of things that the Sister in the laundry will not require. . . . And if one said to the other 'You are very rich—you have many things I have not got'—well to tell you the truth I should expect more wisdom from the laundry.

Poverty, then, consists in having just what is necessary for our work. And riches consist in having much more than is necessary. The works in this world are so various that everyone requires different things. And what is superfluous for the one is not superfluous for another. And you must *not* have superfluities.

The wonderful thing in this miracle here presented is that our

dear Lord gave them all as much as they *would*. Five small loaves would not be sufficient to feed them all, even if they were rationed. But our blessed Lord did not ration. He gave them as much as they would. I can quite imagine, some of them, like myself, would send up their plates two or three times. He did not say 'You can't have a second helping'—and if anyone said 'May I have a little more', he let them have as much as *they* would. It is an extraordinary thing that unless people are out of their mind they do not want more than they feel they need. Thus, St Chrysostom points out in one of his homilies that even the child at the breast will give up taking its nourishment when it has had enough. Most people really know when they have had enough of anything. You do not want, for instance, an indefinite number of clothes. And if you are small you do not want those of a person 6 foot 6. There are some people who are very cold—or they think they are—and they require a lot of clothes. People who do not feel the cold do not want them. So poverty means having what we need. You do not want, for instance, an infinitely large room—it would be most inconvenient. You want one of the proper size, or you can't keep it clean. You will feel lonely if it gets beyond a certain size. But when you get to money, money is not things, especially if it is just a piece of paper with somebody's name written on it. You can get more and more but it doesn't seem to inconvenience you. If you get too much to eat there is a time when you feel ill. You do not feel ill if you pile one pound note on top of another. You do not begin to feel sick. We are at fundamental things now. There are some who have not practised voluntary poverty and now they are going to practise involuntary poverty. The prodigal son did not practise poverty. He began to live on his capital and unfortunately squandered his money in a very bad way. He did not practise poverty and what was the result? Because he didn't practise it voluntarily he had to practise it involuntarily—he was housed with the swine, he had their food, and he began to realise that swine-food is not fit food for a man, nor are swine fit company for man.

Poverty then is a fundamental thing, and a thing for the individual. Each individual has to be poor. She must have that poverty compatible with her work. Now the first idea of a skilled worker is to see how little he can do with. Then he gets on with his work much better. You can always tell a workman by his tools—and *the fewness of his tools*. The chief tools in the world are the human brain and the human hand. The individual must be poor, and his chief concern must be to see that he can do without. And the work must be good work. The less we have for doing that work, the better will the work be done. And the better will be the workman. The chief

function of the Community is to work, and the next is to see with how little that work can be done. Everything that is superfluous should be abolished. There should be a searching survey of what is superfluous and it should be ruthlessly set aside. There is hardly a nation in the world that is not now suffering from poverty—involuntary poverty. We must practise voluntary poverty. You can make your meditation on that as often as you like. It is a practical thing. Make your meditation on how to be careful about the soap—all sorts of things. And you can make your meditation on the love of God in such a simple thing as that.

Look at Nazareth. Now at the end of my life I realise salvation does not come from Jerusalem, nor from Rome, nor from London, Chicago, New York, Shanghai, Peking, but from Nazareth. And I think that the thing that would strike you if you went to call on our Lady and the Incarnate Son of God would be the poverty, the simplicity. Nothing superfluous. Then what would be your feelings when you realised that in that abject poverty was all that was necessary for the Redemption of the world!

VINCENT McNABB, O.P.

[From a retreat preached to religious sisters in 1934].

POVERTY AND THE LAND

POVERTY is an essential attribute of the good landsman. That is a truth that may easily be misunderstood, but it is a truth nevertheless.

It may be well to begin by dispelling some misconceptions. First of all it must be made clear that poverty is neither a synonym for destitution nor for financial failure. Poverty is a positive way of living that implies sufficiency, but rejects the accumulation of superfluities. It is indeed more than that. It is the inevitable result of the practice of charity, since Catholic teaching insists that ownership is not absolute, but must be limited by the needs of others. In this wider meaning of universal application obviously the landsman takes his place beside every other kind of worker. Charity is incumbent upon every human being, and is not the special perquisite of any particular kind of man. The landsman like everyone else may practise charity imperfectly or not at all, but, if he be a *good* landsman, he will at all events have created conditions for himself compatible with the practice of that greatest of the virtues—in a word he will be poor.

But there is another misconception that must be cleared away. Given freedom and the absence of unfair handicaps beyond his