

FAITH MATTERS

ISSUE 36

A PUBLICATION OF AVE MARIA MUTUAL FUNDS

SERVING HUNGRY SOULS

BY FR. STEPHEN PULLIS



One of the most remarkable aspects of the earlier Christians was their radical love for one another and those in need. In fact, there are numerous sources in antiquity — Christian, Jewish and pagan — who actually remark that Christians caused surprise and even scandal by their selfless love of the poor, outcasts and the sick. Highlighting this radical difference between Christians and pagans, Emperor Julian writes to a pagan priest of his day: “For it is disgraceful when ... the impious Galilean [a derogatory term for Christians who followed Jesus from Galilee] support our poor in addition to their own.” Christian charity extended beyond those within the Church and even to pagans!

Caring for the material needs of others is central to our identity as Catholics. It is a reflection to “be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect,” as Christ told his disciples. (Mt 5:48) It is also an acknowledgment of the spiritual reality that we are far poorer and in need of God’s grace than even the most desperate beggar. St. James seems to tell us that it is hypocrisy to give a poor person a blessing without seeking to assist them in their material need: “If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and in lack of daily food, and one of you say to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and filled,’

without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit?” (Jas 2:15-16)

As concerned as we are to care for the body, we have a deeper hunger to care for the soul. Jesus tells us that spiritual dangers are more acute than even physical dangers. (Mt 10:24-33) The work of the Church has deeper roots, a more ambitious goal and a clearer vision than a social service agency or an international humanitarian foundation. The goal of Christ’s Church — his Catholic Church — is to make the kingdom of God present in this world.

God’s kingdom is present wherever, whenever and however, Christ is made king; and making Christ king means bringing ourselves and others into an undeniably transformative relationship with the God of infinite love for us.

Our care for one’s material needs is not dependent on their coming under the kingship of Christ. It is not dependent on their becoming Catholic (nor is it dependent on one being grateful for what is done for them; what we give is freely given — no strings attached) for them to receive it or for us to continue to give and serve. But our service *must* stem



from our relationship with Christ and his Church: “Every Catholic charitable work must also be an authentic expression of Catholic faith.” (*Unleash the Gospel*, Marker 8.4) In order to do this more faithfully, I propose three things for us to keep in mind:

OUR CHARITY IS AN EXTENSION OF OUR LOVE FOR GOD

If you have not prayed the Act of Love prayer before, I encourage you to look it up (a.k.a. Google it) and pray it. Along with the Act of Faith, Act of Hope and Act of Contrition, these prayers help focus our hearts and therefore our actions more soundly on the wisdom of the church. In the Act of Love, we speak to God, saying, “I love my neighbor as myself for the love of you.”

In these few words is incredible theological richness. Committing to love others — and not an amorphous “other” but the personal other whom God has put into my life, my neighbor — as ourselves *for love of God*. It is first and foremost because God has loved us that we have the capacity and the impetus to love others. This is the same beautiful understanding of love which we read in John’s first

epistle: “In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins.” (1 Jn 4:10)

Therefore, each act of charity we are able to perform is an extension of God’s love for us and our returning that love for God. We love others because God loved us first. We love others with the love God has placed into our hearts through the sacramental grace we received at our baptism and which is renewed and enriched each time we receive holy Communion with faith and devotion.

BE JESUS TO OTHERS

This second point flows naturally from the first: We must love others *how Jesus loved them*. This love of Jesus is always concrete. Christian love cannot simply be a sentiment or a feeling. It has to be real and actionable. Jesus did not love us by simply considering taking on our flesh and dwelling among us. He did not love us by purely contemplating his denial, betrayal, Passion and death.

He did not love others by merely looking at the crowd with pity. He indeed loved in deed! By his Incarnation, his preaching, his healing, his listening and his responding. He



loved through the all-too-real suffering (both internal and external) of the Passion and death.

Therefore, our love must be concrete. It must take the shape of caring for the material and spiritual needs of others in the circumstances they find themselves in. There is always the temptation to look for situations that are more to our liking, but this is a deeply unchristian response. Our works of charity respond to the needs of our neighbor, whatever he or she might demand of us. For our society, in addition to the material needs, it necessarily includes the spiritual goods of others: helping them see Jesus in us, being ready to point them to Jesus, who reveals man fully to himself. (*Gaudium et Spes* 22) This shows how works of charity and our work of evangelization meet in evangelical charity. We are called to have the love of the heart of Jesus — which he ardently desires to give to us — so that we can respond to the deepest desires of the hearts of others. These desires can only be fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

SEE JESUS IN OTHERS

Evangelical charity can only be effective — and effective here is the spiritual effect which God wants to work in us and in another — if we

truly see Christ in the other person in need. When Jesus speaks of the judgment of the nations in the 25th chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, those who performed works of mercy are told that the one they are truly ministering to is Christ: “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to the one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.” (Mt 25: 31-46)

Seeing Jesus in those who are in material or spiritual need does not come naturally. We need to pray for the eyes to see this reality and practice the building up of virtue to treat others in accord with this truth.

The concrete circumstances of our time demand a particular care for the spiritual needs of other brothers and sisters. So many have left the Catholic Church through scandal, moral relativism and for myriad other reasons. But the enticements of the world and the (at times grievous) failing of Catholics do not need to be the end of the story. Our existence at this time in this place is not an accident. The great spiritual needs of many, even many Catholics, should spur us on to be the hands and feet and especially the heart of Jesus Christ for them. *Come Lord Jesus, give me a great hunger to bring souls to you!*

REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION FROM
UNLEASH THE GOSPEL MAGAZINE





FR. STEPHEN PULLIS

Reverend Stephen Pullis is full-time faculty and has an external formation position at Sacred Heart Major Seminary. Fr. Pullis currently serves as the Director for Evangelization and Missionary Discipleship within the Archdiocesan Curia.



Schwartz Investment Counsel, Inc., a registered investment adviser established in 1980, serves as investment adviser for Ave Maria Mutual Funds and invests only in securities that meet the Funds' investment and religious requirements. The returns may be lower or higher than if decisions were based solely on investment considerations. The Funds' method of security selection may or may not be successful and the Funds may underperform or outperform the stock market as a whole. All mutual funds are subject to market risk, including possible loss of principal.

Request a prospectus, which includes investment objectives, risks, fees, charges and expenses, and other information that you should read and consider carefully before investing. The prospectus can be obtained by calling 1-866-283-6274 or it can be viewed at www.avemariafunds.com.

Distributed by Ultimus Fund Distributors, LLC. Schwartz Investment Counsel, Inc. and Ultimus Fund Distributors, LLC are separate and unaffiliated.

200-134-011526 | 14477463-UFD-2/14/2022