



“Stretch forth your
hand to the poor” (Sir 7:32)

World Day of the Poor 2020

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Statement for World Day of Poor

This Year’s World Day of the Poor occurs in the course of a pandemic that swept over our world, catching us unprepared and flinging us into a sustained period of uncertainties and challenges. Poverty suddenly appeared in a variety of guises – in those from whom life was taken because of the virus, in the bereaved with a lamentably reduced possibility of common support and funeral liturgy, in those who found themselves robbed of the security of work, in those whose educational journey was severely disrupted, in those whose mental health deteriorated, in those deprived of regular friendship and support. And for many, a denting of hope. Many projects and dreams, sports and leisure activities, regular routines and normal interactions curtailed.

On this World Day of the Poor, let us be grateful for all those hands that have never stopped reaching out to the poor in its various guises; the people who lack life’s basic necessities or the ‘new poor’ whose lives have been disrupted

as just mentioned. So many acts of solidarity, kindness, generosity reaching and connecting across the roadblocks of poverty that otherwise keep us apart.

One way this year to mark the World Day of the Poor is to ask ourselves: what reasons for hope can I share with those in need around me. Our very presence and reaching out can be a reason for hope to those who feel weighed down or burdened. Being bearers of good news, good advice, good listening and good company offers reasons for hope. St. Paul says, God loves a cheerful giver. Let there be cheer in our dealings with others.

There is one specific need I would like to highlight. There is undoubtedly a silent cry of people who have fallen unexpectedly on hard times. They may not be visibly poor but they are beginning to feel the worry of just not being able to make ends meet – for themselves, their children. It may even be the first time in their lives that they have experienced this. The mortgage payment is still there. The food bills are constant. The Electricity bills, TV licence... It could be putting real strain on their relationship, their children may for the first time be exposed to disagreement and we all know the worry that's caused in children by parents quarrelling.

This may be a new experience for some people and they are suffering it in silence. It might have various forms – from financial pressure to mental health issues. People may feel incapable of turning to ask for help.

I would appeal to all of us to encourage each other – if we need help not to be afraid to say so. There's no shame in suddenly falling on hard times, also financial hard times. Unfortunately, it's all too common today. It's so important that we seek the support of others as others want to support.

We're all in this together and we need to support each other in this extremely unusual situation.

I conclude with a few lines from the Book of the Prophet Sirach: "Set your heart right and be steadfast, and do not be impetuous in time of calamity. Cling to him and do not depart, so that your last days may be prosperous. Accept whatever befalls you, and in times of humiliation be patient. For gold is tested in the fire, and those found acceptable, in the furnace of humiliation. Trust in him, and he will help you; make your ways straight, and hope in him. (Sir 2:2-7)"

Bishop Brendan Leahy

14th November 2020