

THE COLOR OF MONEY

It's essential to find time to help the less fortunate

Once the choirs have stopped singing and the homilies have been delivered, will Pope Francis' urging that we all commit to helping the poor make a difference?

I hope the pope's advocacy of the poor not only changes minds but inspires people to become involved in helping the less fortunate.



Michelle Singletary

"Each son or daughter of a given country has a mission, a personal

and social responsibility," the pope said during his address to a joint meeting of Congress.

And don't just give your money. Give your time and talents.

My husband, who stretches out his workday so that he can have a day off every other week, has decided to spend many of those days accompanying me to a prison in Maryland where we teach financial literacy to inmates.

Many of them will have trouble finding affordable housing and a job once they're released. As a result, trapped into poverty, they will struggle. And for too many that battle will lead to more bad choices.

My husband and I hope that, with the money management skills that we aim to impart, the men will be better equipped to change their economic standing and become productive citizens.

I tell you this not to brag but to ask you to join us and so many others who see "the least of these," as the Bible calls them — the poor, the hungry, the homeless and the incarcerated — not as people to

despise, judge or criticize but as folks who could use some compassionate care.

Some successful people like to point out that they got what they have through grit and dedication. So why should they help others who ought to be able to help themselves? The pope acknowledged those who have worked so hard, telling Congress, "I would like to take this opportunity to dialogue with the many thousands of men and women who strive each day to do an honest day's work, to bring home their daily bread, to save money and — one step at a time — to build a better life for their families."

But look beyond yourself, the pope asked. He recalled the Selma-to-Montgomery march 50 years ago led by Martin Luther King Jr. and said, "I am happy that America continues to be, for many, a land of dreams. Dreams which lead to action, to participation, to commitment." That's the word: Commitment.

What have you committed to do to help others achieve the American dream? Have you fed the hungry (and not just during the holidays)? Have you opened your home to someone who needed a place to stay? When you heard someone had been unemployed for months, did you reach out to offer assistance in some way?

"Let us seek for others the same possibilities which we seek for ourselves," the pope said. "Let us help others to grow, as we would like to be helped ourselves. In a word, if we want security, let us give security; if we want life, let us give life; if we want opportunities, let us provide

opportunities. The yardstick we use for others will be the yardstick which time will use for us."

The pope also mentioned Dorothy Day, who co-founded the Catholic Worker Movement, as an admirable example of activism.

As the pope told Congress, "I would encourage you to keep in mind all those people around us who are trapped in a cycle of poverty. They too need to be given hope. The fight against poverty and hunger must be fought constantly and on many fronts, especially in its causes."

The pope probably lost some folks when he talked about the "distribution of wealth." Often, when people hear those words, they feel it's unfair to take from them to give to others they consider irresponsible or undeserving. Others worry they won't have enough for themselves. But how much is enough?

My pastor, John K. Jenkins, started a series of messages on service he calls #PassTheSalt. In explaining the theme, he pointed out that among its many attributes, salt brings out the flavor in food. The same can be said for your service to others, particularly the poor.

"Are you pulling the best or worst out of people?" Jenkins asked.

My pastor's messages, like the pope's visit, have inspired me to do even more. As Pope Francis told Congress, "Now is the time for courageous actions and strategies, aimed at implementing a 'culture of care' and 'an integrated approach to combating poverty.'"

So how will you serve the poor? Will you be the salt of the earth?

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