



Women Who Are Poor

by David Thomasma, O.P.

In the spirit of Charles de Foucauld, the Little Sisters of Jesus practice their vow of poverty imitating Jesus the poor man in his hidden life at Bethlehem and Nazareth. Their spirit is one of inner dispossession and confident abandonment to the Love of the Father more than one of meticulous exterior observances. Striving to bear generously the hardships of poverty which they encounter, the little sisters prefer them to the possession of all earthly goods. For poverty

permits them to be free to love the little, the humble and the poor . . . whose lot they share.

This preferential love for the poor leads them to share the laborious poverty, the social condition, the servitudes, the sufferings and the humiliations of the poor and oppressed. Such poverty frees them from personal preoccupation, disposing them to complete abandonment and making them even more available for fraternal love. For this reason their whole way of life expresses their humble social condition: the style of their dwellings, simple and poor, allows them to share the suffering of those who lack room and well-being. However their love of poverty, which demands of them humility and understanding towards the poor, never justifies harshness towards the rich. For the vow of poverty has its source in the Love of their Beloved Brother and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Hence, their fraternal love, the entire reason for their professed poverty, is an overflowing of their contemplative life. The loving contemplation of the hidden carpenter of Nazareth opens their own love to all men. Their love is to be universal. No milieu, no people, no man can be excluded from it.

The little sisters express this universal love first of all by an effort to understand and befriend every human being, whoever he might be, christian or non-christian, rich or poor. But the particular manifestation of this universal love will always be toward the least of men. For they give themselves in humble and fraternal respect towards the humblest, the poorest and the most unfortunate of their brothers.

The inspiration of this new religious life in the Church comes from Charles de Foucauld, who once wrote:

“We empty our hearts of the love of material things, by interior poverty, by the intimate destitution of the soul detached from all that is not God and Jesus, using material things only for the love of God and in obedience to God, as far as He commands it; always ready to have less rather than more, to suffer want rather than to want nothing, in order to be more like Him who had ‘no stone upon which to lay his head’ and for whose garments ‘lots were drawn.’”

The little sisters of Jesus are women who embrace a life of poverty in the world, today, in order to concretize the love Jesus has for every man in any milieu. They are humble workers, earning their bread laboriously, like Jesus, from day to day. Their share in the life of the poor is a share in the Kingdom of God.