

Sirach 3:17-23

Ps 112:1-2,4-5,7,9

II Cor 8:9,13-15; 9:10-15

Mt 6:1-4

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For all time we will be known as the generation that had the opportunity to end poverty and hunger.

1. Would you like to end poverty and eradicate hunger from the world?

Of course you would.

2. Is it possible to end poverty and eradicate hunger, or is this just a pious wish?

Never before in history was it possible. It is today.

During the celebration of the second year of our Augustinian Jubilee, we celebrate today a very important figure in the history of the Order of St Augustine: St. Thomas of Villanova. Thomas was known for holiness and the service he gave to others; he is a model that calls us even today to renew our commitment to be servants of the Church, and servants of the poor.

St. Thomas of Villanova is imprinted in our mind as a defender of the poor, a man of charity, a promoter of solidarity. He was a truly extraordinary man of his times, outstanding among his Augustinian brothers, in his own Christian community. He did everything within his power to address the needs of the poor and the hungry. But he did not have within his power the possibility of ending poverty and hunger, even in his own country.

3. Would Thomas have chosen to work to end poverty and eradicate hunger if it were possible in his time?

Without a doubt, he would have.

Unlike Thomas, **WE CAN**. Yes, it is within our power, the first generation in the recorded history of humanity to have within its grasp the real possibility of ending poverty and hunger, and change the world forever, for better.

Our generation is heir to two and a half centuries of economic progress. Further progress is possible, but not inevitable. There are divergent opinions on the path toward progress.

“If you want peace, work for justice” Pope Paul VI said. Unfortunately, many people and their governments today say rather: “If you want peace, prepare for war.” The power of war may conquer, but Iraq has proved that the power of war cannot change people’s hearts.

The wealth of the rich world, the power of today’s vast storehouses of knowledge, and the declining fraction of the world that needs help to escape from poverty all make the end of poverty a realistic possibility by the year 2025.

Will we have the good judgment to use our wealth wisely, to heal a divided planet, to end the suffering of those still trapped by poverty and to forge a common bond of humanity, security and shared purpose across cultures and regions?

4. Will poverty and hunger be eradicated if we MERELY keep on doing what we are ALREADY doing?

Definitely NOT. In the face of tsunami and hurricanes, we respond admirably in CHARITY, much as Thomas would and did in his times. But charity is mainly understood as assistance, welfare, giving someone a fish to eat.

5. What MORE needs to be done?

We can identify two main points:

A. Help put JUSTICE issues into the mainstream of Christian, Catholic activity. Moving beyond CHARITY – understood as good works, immediate relief of basic needs – to work toward the transformation of society, towards a society based on SOLIDARITY – willingly assuming the cause of those in need, not necessarily their pain, their limitations, but their CAUSE, making it voluntarily our own. We don’t need to be hungry in order to assume the cause of those who are. Hence, advocacy on behalf of and along with those who are poor and hungry.

B. NETWORK.

Thomas ALONE, in his time, could not feed all the hungry or end poverty. And yet if we choose to associate ourselves with other people and organizations who share our values and are working toward the same goal: the Millennium Development Goals, approved by the world leaders in the Jubilee year, then our voice, our efforts, our interest can have greater resonance.

Your personal testimony is not enough; we need to come together on this, to work as communities, networking among ourselves and with others, toward these admirable goals.

The very sacrament we celebrate is a witness that this is possible: we all gather, without distinction, equal in dignity, around the Lord’s table and discover there truly is enough for all. We have been invited, have responded, we are nourished and we will be sent out, in mission, to spread the Good News. Ending poverty and hunger is not only possible, it is certain, it is in God’s plan. How can we help shape the future? This task is

a collective one. We can be crushed by the task, or creative.

We are beyond the situation where complaints and plaintive demonstrations against those who have had it in their power in the past to do something about ending poverty and hunger were appropriate. NOW is the time for witnesses, for positive, concrete, coordinated and significant action to transform society, to eradicate hunger rather than simply to feed those who are hungry.

We CAN be the generation that ended poverty and hunger, but WILL WE CHOOSE TO BE?