

Given to be Given

“How shall I make a return to the Lord for all the good He has done for me?” Ps 116:12

In a famous text, *Poverty of Spirit*, by the German theologian, Johannes Metz, one finds a most paradoxical saying about the human person. He writes, **“The unending nature of our poverty as human beings is our only innate treasure.”**

How is that? How is *poverty* convertible with *treasure*? Metz identifies poverty as our truth because of *“the insatiable interest in the Absolute that captivates us. . . The ultimate meaning of man is hidden in God.”* Such is to say that what the human soul really and truly wants and desires is utterly beyond acquisition. By all means available to us, we try to fill the emptiness and satiate our desires, but they all fall short; they are all temporary. Only God, by a divine intervention in history, can bring us to the goal.

Metz refers to this condition of our human nature as **“Transcendental Neediness.”** By contrast, the animals around us have no need to compose poetry, great works of art or to launch rockets to other planets and stars. They have arrived. They aspire to no more than survival and reproduction. They do not have the chronic restlessness of human beings.

Consider, therefore, the descent of the Son of God into our poverty. Here is a divine revelation which corresponds to true, human experience! The poverty of Jesus in the manger at Bethlehem is not some salutary display of humility for us to admire and sentimentalize on Christmas Cards. It is, rather, the revelation of God to us of **our truth**. Jesus, true God and true man, lived more fully the truth of human nature than any human being. God-become-fully human and accepted the poverty of being human to the absolute “last drop,” (*“Can you drink the cup I drink? Mk 10:35ff)*

James and John may have made the bold claim to accept the “cup” of Jesus suffering for themselves, perhaps foretelling their martyrdom, but in the fullest sense of which Metz writes, they could not. **Our “poverty” is repulsive to us.** As Metz would have it, *“Any possession or personal strength tempts us to vain self-reliance.”*

The Messiah does not come in power; he comes in poverty. It isn't a bit of theater along the lines of Dicken's *A Christmas Carol*: It is God revealing us to ourselves. He is *“the first born of all creation,”* (Col 1:15). Sin is a compromise with the truth of our poverty; it is a way of putting-off or deferring to another day facing our truth. But, in the sinless One, there is no compromise. He enters our human nature fully and completely, demonstrating to us how one arrives at the goal of this life . . . total surrender and abandonment to God. Herein one should evoke Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane and forsaken upon the Cross.

Still, even with the example given to us, from Bethlehem, through Nazareth, unto Calvary, we can't do it. In answer to the question posed by the quotation from Psalm 116, the answer is **“NOTHING!”** I have nothing, from my own resources, to return to the Lord for all the good He has done for me. Nada! Zippo! But, the Good News is that God-in-human-nature, Jesus, has been given, and gave himself, to us to present to the Father in the mystery of Mass every Sunday. *“Through Him, and with Him, and in Him . . . “*



The tragedy is that we are too impoverished to even live the truth of our poverty and, thereby, make that full surrender to God required to bring our lives to fulfillment. And so, as I hold aloft the Real Presence of the Son of God at Mass and say those words, I am not looking at the Sacrament but I am looking at the Father in Heaven to whom we are making the offering, (It is a subtlety of my way of celebrating which not every priest may do. It is because, in that particular moment, I do not believe it is the moment of adoration but the moment of offering.) And, essentially, I am saying ---we are saying--- *“Lord, I cannot “drink the cup” of my poverty to the last drop, but your Son did that for me. Please accept my act of faith in Him as my savior and Him as my offering to you. Have mercy on me, in your kindness!”*

The mystery of Christmas is not just God becoming Human, it is also about humans becoming truly human.