

The article of sister Malgorzata Chmielewska published in the weekly paper „ Tygodnik Powszechny” (Kraków 31 – 007, ul. Wiślna 12, tel: +48 12 422 23 11, email:redakcja@tygodnik.com.pl) on the of 10 th of March, 2002 (POLAND).

Sister Malgorzata is running shelters for homeless people, for single mothers and families in Poland.

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“IS THERE ANOTHER WAY ?”

“And they came to Jericho: and a she went out of Jericho with his disciples and a great number of people, blind Bartimeus, the son of Timotheus, sat by the highway side begging. And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out, and say, Jesus, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me. And many charged him that he should hold his peace: but he cried the more a great deal, Thou Son of David have mercy on me. And Jesus stood still and commanded him to be called. And they call the blind man, saying unto him, Be of good comfort, rise; he calleth thee. And he, casting away his garment, rose and came to Jesus. And Jesus answered and said unto him, What wilt thou that I should do unto thee? The blind man said unto him, Lord, that I might receive my sight. And Jesus said unto him, Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole. And immediately he received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way”. (Mark 10, 46 –52)

The obtrusive shout of a beggar is annoying, and it keeps us from listening to our beloved master. We don't want to hear about unemployment, homeless, the elderly, children starving on streets, single mothers, etc. Their screaming gets on our nerves, interferes with family celebrations, going for a walk with kids, and having a deserved rest. We hardly can make ends meet, we need to pay our taxes. We plug our ears. And eventually we become aware of our helplessness and we try to excuse ourselves. We blame the poor for being poor, we blame the government for an incompetence, and the church for not doing enough. Not everyone must become Mother Teresa, anyway. We have our own problems, we have family, kids and work.

“ The Christian family is called for a disinterested devotion towards social problems, through treating the poor and those left on the society's social margin as the priority . As we follow Christ, who loved all the poor, we need to find a space in our hearts for the hungry, the poor, the elderly, drug addicts and those who are devoid of a family” – says the Pope John Paul II (“ Familiaris Consortio” 47).

At the end of my life Christ will not ask me what the government, the priest, the nuns or my neighbour has done. He will ask what I have done, me, Malgorzata Chmielewska, in the year of 2002, in February, when this little boy dressed in filthy clothes with a sponge stuffed in his pocket, had appeared in front of me in the gas station and began cleaning my car windows. I answer: “I got out of the car and I payed for the boy's lunch in the restaurant. He ate half of what he had found on the plate and asked me if he could take the rest home, because he was already full.” And Jesus will smile at me and will ask me if I really believed in that. It was clear that the boy could have eaten ten more plates of french fries.

I will tell Jesus that at first I cheated on my conscience and tried to believe the boy, because I didn't feel like doing any more good deeds. If I hadn't believed the boy at once I would have

had to go with him to his house, where I would have undoubtedly met five of his hungry siblings, for whom he had picked up the left-overs (the half of the meal he didn't eat). There wouldn't have been any chance for me to escape.

So at first I tried not to believe him as I said. We left the restaurant and he was disappearing in the dark. I didn't feel very well though getting into my car so I asked him to wait. Finally we went together by car. He clutched the bag of french fries and looked as if he was worried that I was going to kidnap him. At the house there were no five siblings of him, but eight plus two unemployed parents. And because there was no way for me to run away, I have got involved with helping the family.

As long as the poverty does not have a face, you can omit it, but when you look at its face, it becomes your Brother. I gained ten more brothers, and I was complaining deep inside (Jesus knows about it well) that I've got "a bit" too many brothers already, and that Jesus could have given some break from such a trouble-making family.

" A full justice will be possible only when people stop treating a poor person, who asks for some support to maintain life, as a burden, but will perceive him as a chance for them, and as a source of doing good for the sake of good itself, the opportunity of achieving a greater abundance. "
(*" Centesimus Annus "* 58).

" They have taken away the dole from me, the kind of social money which is received by single mothers, who bring up their handicapped kids" – tells me the woman, who lives in our house for single mothers. She is a victim of a family violence, and has got two sons, one of them has a down syndrome. " My son needs to have a disability group to receive any social money. Up to now there has been just doctor's certificate required, but everything is changing. Both of my children will celebrate their first communion in May. I need to pay 150 zloty for each of them at church, buy special robes and contribute some money for presents for the priest and the religion teacher. It is going to be about 500 zloty in total. Where am I supposed to get it? I work as a cleaning lady and I make 300 zloty a month for two hours of cleaning".

" All over the world the church has a desire to be the church of the poor ". (*" Redemptoris Missio "* 61).

" Both me and my husband are over seventy - somebody tells me. Our retirement pension is really low. Despite of it, we have decided to allocate 50 zloty per month for an education of the child from a poor family.

" All of you who are abandoned and left by yourselves on the margin of our consumptive society. All of you who are sick, handicapped, poor, hungry, who are emigrants, refugees, and prisoners. All of you who are unemployed, old or who are victims of wars and any kind of violence growing in our liberal society. The church takes part in your suffering, which leads to Christ. We count on your testimonies, which are necessary for teaching the world what love is about. We will do anything we can for you to find your own place in the church and in the society. " (*" Christifideles Laici "* 53)

I am grateful to you my brothers, who are homeless, for any gesture of love and friendship. For your sense of humour, for a cigarette that you are willing to share, even though it's the last one, for the lunch you made today, for a church service which we attend together, for your patience in enduring humiliation and suffering, for you fighting the alcohol addiction,

and for your humbleness. Thank you, my handicapped Arthur, for waking me up in the morning and saying: “Gosia, I love you “. Thank you for the fact that even when you are half-conscious after the attack of epilepsy, you smile and say: “Gosia, don’t worry, it doesn’t hurt any more.” Tomek, I am grateful that you came to us at the age of 16, as a young, homeless person, and that you had a courage to start school despite being perceived by everyone as a marginalized guy. You woke up at 5 every morning and walked 5 km to the bus stop, and then you would come back 5 km on foot. You would spend half an hour every day in the chapel, which you earlier had built together with us in a great heat and rain, 12 hours every day. Your perseverance is an example for me. Although you will not get a Nobel Prize, your school report is worth more than a university diploma of a mathematical genius. And perhaps your prayer gets faster to God than a gregorian singing.

We are glad that the Holy Father will visit Poland again...

Translated by Ewa Sadowska (a volunteer of the Barka School in Poznań, Poland)