



Archdiocese of San Antonio
Most Rev. Gustavo García-Siller



Homily for Ash Wednesday at UTSA March 5, 2014

“Return to me with your whole heart!” The Lord says to each of us today: Return to me! Perhaps we have not totally turned our backs on God. But are we truly walking in his ways? Can we truthfully and honestly say that we have not sinned at all? No, I think not. In the penitential rite we acknowledge that we have sinned by what we have done and by what we have failed to do.

Pope Francis has published a message for Lent 2014 with this theme: “He became poor, so by that his poverty you might become rich” (2 Cor 8:9). The Holy Father asks us to reflect on what this means for our lives today.

The poverty of Jesus – his incarnation as a man – shows us how God works. “He does not reveal himself cloaked in worldly power and wealth but in weakness and poverty.” He is born in a stable because there was no room in the inn. His early life in Nazareth was hidden; it did not attract people’s attention. Then he became an itinerant preacher with nowhere to lay his head. He was reviled by many and eventually put to death. But throughout his life he revealed God’s love, healing power, generosity, gentleness.

Jesus did not seek poverty for its own sake. “God did not let our salvation drop down from heaven, like someone who gives alms from their abundance out of a sense of altruism and piety.” When Jesus stepped into the waters of the Jordan to be baptized, it was not because it was a sinner, in need of redemption. “He did it to be among people who need forgiveness, among us sinners, and to take upon himself the burden of our sins. He became poor so that we might enjoy the riches of salvation.

This has great implications for our lives. “Wherever we go, we are called as Christians to proclaim the liberating news that forgiveness for sins is possible, that God is greater than our sinfulness, that he freely loves us at all times and that we were made for communion and eternal life.”

This means that we need to “bear witness to all those who live in material, moral, and spiritual destitution – we need to proclaim to them the gospel message of the merciful love of God our Father, who is ready to embrace everyone in Christ.” We can do this to the extent that we imitate Christ who became poor and enriched us by his poverty. We do this by living the gospel daily – proclaiming the Lord Jesus and his gospel – in word and deed, especially in deeds. We do this during Lent through our voluntary fasting , daily prayer, and almsgiving – sharing not of our abundance, but out of our poverty. The Holy Father says that he distrusts “a charity that costs nothing and does not hurt.”

So, let us enter into Lent with determination and joy. God shares his unconditional love with us so that we might share it with others. May the Holy Spirit guide us through Lent. Ven, Holy Spirit, Ven!