

Witness: 16 years with the Poor

The poor have taught me what is at the heart of really being human. I have often said that, perhaps I am the one who is poor. The situation of poverty has truly led me to reflect. They act like us and they are not like us.

The pastor who had lived a profound experience among the poor told me: You have to take them in a completely different way, for example, they seem to be happy in what seems, to me, to be tragic. One day, a group of poor people were speaking about the past, and their openness far surpassed my own. They shared who they were.

Example: one day, Ginette received a phone call from her husband, who had left her a long time ago, who told her that he was very sick. Ginette accepted to go back to live with him, to take care of him and to support him until his death... We had to think that she still loved him.

Their ways of thinking are very different from ours: They use their intelligence but also their feelings. I asked myself if perhaps they have a greater understanding of the meaning of love than I do. I am not minimizing anything. Intelligence yes, but they taught me something about the heart and feelings and emotions.

If I were given the opportunity of living among the poor, I'd leave right away, without a moment's hesitation. (Don't laugh.)

There are two kinds of poverty: those who are truly poor and those who flaunt their poverty (a beggar on horseback). I am very relaxed with the first group but I have difficulty with the second group. I have often thought of Mother Marie-Rose when she lived in Beloeil. Sr. Claire Ainsley, in her book, referred to the jealousy among the servants... I too, have suffered...and my stay among the poor was very beneficial. If I had been offered the opportunity of living and working with the poor at the beginning of my religious life, I would have certainly said, "Yes". But, my career was devoted to teaching, a choice I have never regretted and have loved throughout my life.

Poverty cannot be based on lack of financial means, it is something else, something intangible, it is interior, it is a state. The poor helped me to see this. They knew me. God is always found in my weaknesses and it is there that we find each other. Education is not only synonymous with teaching, it impacts everywhere.

I would like to share with you a thought that often comes to mind: If, when I had been in the Novitiate I had foreseen my sixteen years living and working among the poor, I would have deemed it impossible, but the impossible became my reality. Thank you very much!

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1918-2010