



## Archbishop Shelton's Pastoral Reflections

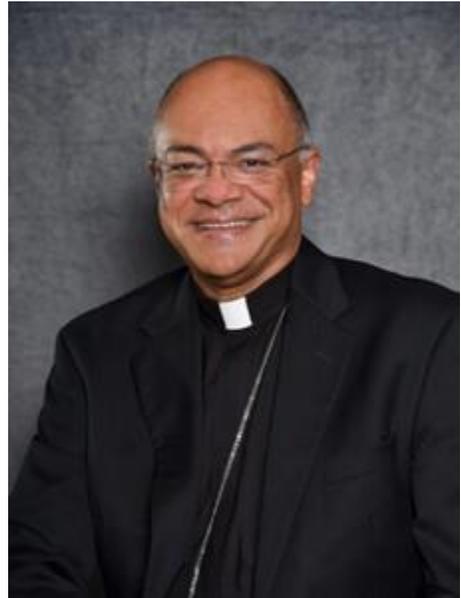
April 2025

### The “Preferential Option” for the Poor

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Loving care for the poor and vulnerable is a consistent theme in both the Old and New Testaments. Our Lord’s teaching about the last judgment is quite specific. We will be judged worthy or unworthy of eternal life based on how we treated Christ Himself in the “least” of His sisters and brothers—especially the hungry and thirsty, the naked and homeless, the prisoner and the stranger (cf. Mt 25:31–46).

In his encyclical *Deus Caritatis Est* (God is love), Pope Benedict XVI taught that “love for widows and orphans, prisoners, and the sick and needy of every kind, is as essential as the ministry of the sacraments and preaching of the Gospel.” Even in public policy, the Church insists that this preferential option, or respect, for the poor be kept always in view. In fact, according to Catholic social teaching, the most significant moral test of any society is how it treats its most vulnerable members—especially the unborn, the elderly, those who suffer from disabilities, and the poor. These “least” of our sisters and brothers should have the most urgent moral claim on the conscience of every nation, and we are all called to look at public-policy decisions in terms of how they affect the poor.



In *Octogesima Adveniens* (1971), an encyclical marking the eightieth anniversary of Pope Leo XIII’s seminal treatment of modern social issues, *Rerum Novarum*, Pope Paul VI evoked the fundamental importance of a transformative spirit of self-sacrificial love. “In teaching us charity,” he wrote, “the Gospel instructs us in the preferential respect due to the poor and the special situation they have in society: the most fortunate should renounce some of their rights so as to place their goods generously at the service of others.” Saint John Paul II reinforced this same teaching 20 years later in his encyclical *Centesimus Annus* (100 Years).

Why should we prefer the poor—in our personal lives and in public policy? Because we were commanded to do so by the Lord whose entire life and ministry showed us how much He loves and cares for the poor, the sick and those considered to be social outcasts.

The Church's very nature, her mission, is to continue the work of Jesus, the healer, teacher and pastor. We treat the poor with a preferential respect because that is how the Lord treated them. By virtue of her evangelizing mission, the Church stands with the poor. This doesn't mean that we encourage "class warfare"—pitting the poor against the rich or the middle class. The Church promotes solidarity among all social, economic, racial and ethnic groups. We stand with the poor and against all forms of injustice. Like our Lord, we reach out to (and embrace) all women and men of good will.

Jesus' admonition about how our lives will be judged is pointed and unequivocal: We are to feed the hungry, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, and visit the prisoner. For what we do to the poor and the destitute—"the least of these my brothers and sisters"—we do to the Lord himself.

This is a sober warning. Most of us think mainly about ourselves and about our families and friends, which is still a kind of self-interest. The poor? We may feel a sense of moral obligation to them, but too often the poor are remote and out of sight. Unless we happen to encounter the homeless on city streets, or in some public place, we rarely see them. They are too often invisible—more hypothetical than real.

That's why Catholic social teaching insists that the needs of the poor must take priority. Otherwise, we will quickly forget them as we go about our daily business.

Pope Francis in his pontificate has constantly reminded us of our responsibility to the poor. May we always be a Church that respects the poor, stands with the poor, and serves the poor in Jesus' name.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Shelton J. Fabre". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend Shelton J. Fabre  
Archbishop of Louisville



## Jubilee of the Poor: A Spiritual Reflection

The Jubilee of the Poor is an invitation to embody the spirit of Jubilee, a time to recommit ourselves to uplifting and supporting the poor and ensuring that all people can live with dignity. In the United States, the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) is at the forefront of this effort, supporting programs and initiatives that empower communities to overcome poverty and achieve lasting change.

Supported through a national collection that occurs annually on World Day of the Poor each November, the work of CCHD allows the Church to actively participate in bringing the good news to the poor, echoing the mission of Jesus proclaimed in the synagogue, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord” (Luke 4:18-19).

Through grants to community-driven, low-income-led economic and community development initiatives, CCHD uplifts the voices of the poor and empowers them to create sustainable solutions to the challenges they face. This work reflects a deep commitment by the U.S. Church to the preferential option for the poor, a foundational principle of Catholic Social Teaching that calls us to prioritize the needs of the most vulnerable and to uphold their God-given dignity. As the Catechism reminds us, “The Church's love for the poor . . . is a part of her constant tradition.’ This love is inspired by the Gospel of the Beatitudes, of the poverty of Jesus, and of his concern for the poor.... ‘Those who are oppressed by poverty are the object of a preferential love on the part of the Church which, since her origin and in spite of the failings of many of her members, has not ceased to work for their relief, defense, and liberation.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, nos. 2444, 2448, quoting *Centesimus annus*, no. 57, and *Libertatis conscientia*, no. 68).

The Jubilee of the Poor is not only an opportunity to recommit to the preferential option for the poor and vulnerable, but also an invitation to take one step further into the challenge of living in true solidarity with the poor, something Pope Francis explains “means combatting the structural causes of poverty, inequality, the lack of work, land, and housing, the denial of social and labor rights. It means confronting the destructive effects of the empire of money...Solidarity, understood in its most profound meaning, is a way of making history” (Fratelli Tutti no. 116, quoting Address to the Meeting of Popular Movements).

As we anticipate the Jubilee of the Poor, this invitation to solidarity with those poor and most vulnerable in our communities is also an opportunity to support the vital work of programs like CCHD, which embodies this solidarity by addressing the root causes of poverty in communities across America. The Jubilee of the Poor is a time to renew our commitment to the Church’s mission to walk with the poor and bring about transformative change. Together, we can live out the Gospel call to serve our brothers and sisters most in need, ensuring that all may experience the fullness of God’s love and mercy.

*(A selection from “Pilgrims on the Way of Hope: A Resource for the Jubilee of the Poor, Jubilee 2025,” United States Conference of Catholic Bishops).*



(CNS photo/Vatican Media)

## **A Message from Pope Francis: Words of Challenge and Hope**

### ***The prayer of the poor rises up to God (cf. Sir 21:5)***

It is beautiful to recall the testimony left to us by Mother Teresa of Calcutta, a woman who gave her life for the poor. Saint Teresa continually repeated that it was from prayer that she drew the strength and faith for her mission of service to the least among us. When she spoke at the General Assembly of the UN on October 26, 1985, showing everyone the rosary she always held in her hand, she said: “I am only a poor sister who prays. By praying, Jesus puts his love in my heart, and I go to give it to all the poor I meet along the way. Pray too! Pray, and you will notice the poor who are beside you. Perhaps on the same floor in your apartment building. Perhaps even in your houses, someone is waiting for your love. Pray, and your eyes will open, and your heart will fill with love”.

How can we not recall here in the city of Rome, Saint Benedict Joseph Labre (1748-1783), whose body rests and is venerated in the parish church of Santa Maria ai Monti. A pilgrim from France to Rome, rejected by many monasteries, he spent the last years of his life poor among the poor, spending hours in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament, with the rosary, reciting the breviary, reading the New Testament and the Imitation of

Christ. Having no place to stay, he usually slept in a corner of the ruins of the Colosseum like a “vagabond of God,” making his life a ceaseless prayer that rose up to God.

As we journey towards the Holy Year, I urge everyone to become pilgrims of hope, setting tangible goals for a better future. Let us not forget to keep “the little details of love” (*Gaudete et Exsultate*, 145): stopping, drawing near, giving a little attention, a smile, a caress, a word of comfort. These gestures are not automatic; they require a daily commitment and are often hidden and silent but strengthened by prayer. In this time, when the song of hope seems to give way to the clamor of arms, to the cry of many innocent wounded, and the silence of the countless victims of wars, we turn to God with our plea for peace. We stretch out our hands to receive peace as a precious gift for we are “poor” in this regard, while at the same time committing ourselves to weave it back into daily life.

We are called in every circumstance to be friends of the poor, following in the footsteps of Jesus who always began by showing solidarity when dealing with the least among us. May the Mother of God, Mary Most Holy, who appeared at Banneux and left a message not to be forgotten: “I am the Virgin of the poor,” sustain us on this journey. To Mary, whom God has looked upon with favor for her humble poverty, accomplishing great things through her obedience, we entrust our prayers, convinced that they will rise to heaven and be heard.

*(A selection from the Message for the Eighth World Day of the Poor, November 17, 2024).*

## **My Prayer for You**

Please join me in this Jubilee Prayer for the poor:

*Holy Spirit,*

*We praise and thank you!*

*You anoint us to*

*bring glad tidings to the poor  
proclaim liberty to captives  
recover sight for the blind  
free the oppressed  
and build communities in keeping  
with God's vision of justice.*

*Show us how to be*

*light of the world  
salt of the earth  
seeds that sprout love  
and leaven that infuses humanity  
with the desire to promote  
human dignity and solidarity.*

*Help us to listen so that*

*those in poverty can lead our efforts to  
proclaim a more hopeful vision  
liberate captives from injustice  
heal the blindness of the powerful  
free us all from self-centeredness  
and build community to overcome poverty.*

*Amen.*