



Look at the poor and touch them

The poor are different from us and, at the most, we give them something out of public consciousness, if we happen to meet them but we prefer to ignore them. Pope Francis' words.

by **Simone Marini**

Do you give alms?" "Yes, father!" "Good, good. And tell me when you give alms do you look into the face the person you give the alms to?" "Well I don't know, I did not notice it". "And when you give alms do you touch the hand of the person you give alms to or do you just throw him a coin?". These words which Pope Francis said seem to have barely touched us and have been

welcomed with a tender smile of sympathy. Yet they remained impressed in our conscience and they resound there persistently and we are restless when there is something we must absolutely do but we keep on forgetting, as in fact we cannot do.

Never, I dare say, has ever been given such a deep meaning to our difficult relationship with poverty and with the poor as believers and non believers.

"Do you touch the hand of the person you give the alms to?". This could be said in a simpler and more immediate way. We do not remember whether we look into the face of the poor we give the alms to, undoubtedly, it has never crossed our minds the possibility of touching them. I say the possibility as excluding it means making a barrier between us and the poor, almost avoiding the risk of being contaminated.

It is fundamental for us, even if perhaps unconsciously, to remain different, on our side, not to mingle and not be mingled, not to lose our identity, not to mix up or even worst be by their side. Then, if we think about it, we exclude the possibility to touch the poor.

The approach of the institutions to poverty is still very traditional: just assistance and in critical situations, even though human rights and the dignity of the person are underlined. The poor are a burden to society and at the most we give them a bit of unnecessary assistance provided our conditions (at present referred to as crisis) enable us to. But basically the poor remain for the institution a deadly burden, a passive and useless world. The poor are different from us and, at the most, we give them something out of public consciousness, if we happen to meet them but we prefer to ignore them. The poor are the invisible how can we touch them? Or still worse how can we make them share with any project in order to change our society? We as people avoid even verbal contact with them. Do we look at them in the face? I do not know, it is always a risk, we could transmit them emotions, understanding. Solidarity. Besides they are too many, always more and they annoy us especially when the telephone rings or we are doing something very important. We do not even conceive the possibility of touching them, we definitively shun them and we, perhaps, even forget any consideration or thought about their lives, their power to resist and the problems they have to face every day in order to survive.

But above all we are careful not to touch them! The barrier that separates us from them is insuperable; it is a concrete tangible proof of their diversity and that they do not belong to our society. Yes, they do not belong to it as this, and not by chance, is not and will never be a community till we mix all together and have the same goals and values relying on our resources first among all the poorest. ●