

Good news to the rich!

My dear sisters and brothers,

As a priest coming from India, people used to ask me about the situation of the church in India. I used to narrate them with full enthusiasm that church in India is young and full. In most of the churches there are at least two holy masses on a Sunday, since over 90% of the believers do not miss the Sunday liturgy.

A young lady who used to attend the church once asked me: Do you know why the churches in the third world are still full?

I told her: I think, because people still have faith in God and his church.

She retorted: "May be...; but I think the churches are full there because the people are still poor. She explained: If they have more easy access to other recreational activities as we have in Europe you will find the churches there also empty."

I was a little astonished and asked back: "Do you come to the church because you are poor?"

She did not answer.

But her question haunts my mind even today.

I ask myself again and again: Has poverty something to do with the faith?

It remains a fact that people turns to God and to the church in their difficulties.

I have heard from old people here that the churches were also full in Europe in times of crisis.

After all, Jesus himself describes his gospel as "the Good News to the poor".

He presents himself as a doctor to the sick, teacher to the ignorant, friend of sinners, socially marginalized and children, shepherd to the Lost Sheep, father to the Prodigal Son.

Does his Good News apply to the healthy, to the intelligent, to the holy, to the socially respected, to the grown-ups, to the sheep still in the fold, the sons and daughters that are not lost?

In other words what is his gospel or Good News to the rich?

Or should they wait till they become poor to receive his Good News?

In the gospel reading today we encounter a rich, successful and socially respected man known by name Jairus.

He was owner of a synagogue.

Jesus had a difficult relation with the people at the synagogue.

We find him in the gospels addressing people in the synagogues.

However, only a few in the synagogue is reported to have received him as a person and his gospel.

A few of them admired his teaching as one with full authority and God-given.

But a vast majority of them rejected him.

They even challenged his authority to preach in a synagogue, since he was born of a carpenter and has not officially studied Jewish law.

They ridiculed him as a common man and often criticized his violation of Mosaic rules – especially the Law of Sabbath.

They described as one possessed by evil-spirit.

Many a time they threw him out of the synagogue and plotted to eliminate him.

He may be described as a synagogue thrown-out.

Hence the encounter between the owner of a synagogue and a synagogue thrown-out in today's gospel receives our special attention.

We do not for sure know which group of the people in the synagogue Jairus belonged to – to the admirers of Jesus or to the detractors. (Most probably he belonged to the latter group, as hinted at a later stage of the gospel event.)

But one thing is clear: He finds himself in a great crisis – his beloved daughter is sick and at the point of death.

He needs Jesus, the wonder-worker to save his daughter!

Therefore, the owner of the synagogue threw himself at the feet of the synagogue thrown-out!

The rich, learned, powerful and holy man fell at the feet of the ignorant (of Mosaic Law), disrespected and rejected teacher!

I come back to my old question.

Does Jesus have Good News to the rich Jairus?

We read that Jesus readily started with him towards his home, where her daughter laid ill. Jesus dropped all his other priorities to attend to Jairus and his daughter.

We do not read much about the discourse between Jesus and Jairus.

It was more a teaching by deeds than by words.

Learning by walking with the Lord!

The events take a dramatic turn as the messengers from his home bring the heart-breaking news that his daughter is no more.

The messengers add a sarcastic comment: Do not trouble the teacher any longer!

Why did they want to stop Jesus on the way or why did they not wish that Jesus come to mourn the death of the child or attend her funeral?

Are these words out of respect or disrespect one can not clearly judge?

But they clearly reveal their lack of faith in him.

Jesus does not pay attention to these comments because he has only Jairus in his focus.

He tells Jairus: Do not be afraid; just have faith.”

Jairus is slowly taught to walk the new way of faith along with Jesus.

At the house, the friends and relatives of Jairus received Jesus with a pooh-poohing.

They could not hold their disrespect for Jesus on hearing Jesus saying that the child is not dead but just sleeps.

An ignorant physician, who cannot distinguish a dead person from the living, they might have thought!

They were not prepared to realize the new spheres of meaning of life Jesus wanted to lead them-the sphere of fullness of life while living and after death!

Jesus woke up the little girl to life and handed her to a jubilant Jairus and the curtain falls.

But what is the good news of Jesus to the rich, the powerful, the intelligent and the holy?

The Jairus event is an eye-opener.

Who can claim to be rich, powerful, intelligent and holy in front of God!

The mere fact death is enough to stop our boasting.

We come to the world empty-handed and return back in the same way.

Shall God be envy at the rich, the intelligent, the powerful and the holy?

Or shall He bring them to realization of their humanness: to be fully human and fully alive?

Or shall He invite them to be his own and to partake in the true richness which he manifests in His poverty, ignorance, ignobility and sinful appearance.

St. Paul, who was himself a young and learnt holy man of Jesus' time, makes this point clear to the church of Corinth.

The church of Corinth was very rich in those days and was considered very modern in her outlook.

Paul asks them to be generous to the poor churches elsewhere after the model of Jesus, who though was rich, yet for their sake, became poor so that by his poverty they might become rich.

Yes, the gospel of the poor according to Jesus is also meant for the rich.

Because, richness is a relative concept!

One who is rich today may become poor tomorrow.

One who is healthy may become sick tomorrow.

One who celebrates his life may die tomorrow.

We are just human beings.

We, poor and rich alike, may partake in the gospel through our preparedness to share like children of God.

We shall strive to achieve perfection in charity.

We are called to be perfect as the heavenly father!

No body sitting in front of me, I think, would say that they come to the church expecting some financial assistance.

That means we do not consider ourselves as poor.

So let us express our belongingness to the Good News by our brotherly and sisterly sharing.