



SVD-Partner (Hg.)



**Welttag der Armen**

**World Day of the Poor**

**Jornada Mundial de los Pobres**

**Journée Mondiale des Pauvres**

**Gebete und Impulse**

**Prayer and Impuls**

**Impuls en Oración**

**Impulsions et Prières**



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# World Day of the Poor

Prayer and Impulse

SVD-Partner

2024

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Unless otherwise stated, the texts originate from SVD-Partners.

**Motto**

- 2017 Let us love, not with words but with deeds
- 2018 This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him
- 2019 The hope of the poor shall not perish forever
- 2020 Stretch out your Hand to the Poor
- 2021 For the poor you have always with you
- 2022 For your sakes Christ became poor
- 2023 Do not turn your face away from anyone who is poor
- 2024 The prayer of the poor rises up to God

## **Prayer**

### **2018 - Let my ears hear the cries of the poor,**

Let my ears hear the cries of the poor,  
my feet carry me to them,  
my eyes recognize their unsaid need,  
my heart feel their sorrows,  
my tongue speak the right words,  
my hands do whatever it takes for them.  
Let me recognize you in my sisters and brothers.  
That's what I'm asking you, my God!

### **2019 - God, you are the hope of the poor**

God, you are the hope of the poor.  
I want to be a messenger of hope and  
eat my bread with them  
share my coat with them  
sing songs of sorrow and songs of praise with them  
suffer in sickness with them  
build huts with them  
discover new ways with them  
hope for you with them.  
God, let me be your messenger!

### **2020 - We, the poor and I**

We, the poor and I, stretch out our hands to You, our God.  
Connect them and make them a bridge between us.  
Take them and lead us on our paths.  
Hold them that we may support each other.  
Open them that we may receive and give.  
Strengthen them that we may help where we need to.  
Put them in Your hand that we may rest with You.  
Teach them to bring peace.  
Caress them that we may tell of Your love with our deeds.  
Bless them that we may act in blessedness.  
We ask You, our God: Stretch out Your hands to us!  
Amen.

## **2021 - The criminal on the cross**

The criminal on the cross and  
the corrupt tax collector,  
the blind Bartimaeus and  
the paralytic at the pond of Bethesda,  
the insane who dwells in the burial caves, and  
the prostitute who salves the feet of an itinerant preacher -  
I do not see such people,  
and if I do,  
they usually disturb me.

But you, Jesus,  
have seen just such people  
and you turned to them,  
healed them, saved them,  
gave them a life worth living and  
and made them feel God's love.

Lord,  
let me see them through your eyes and  
help me recognise you in them.  
Give me a generous heart and  
free me from my prejudices.  
Give me strength and courage  
to reach out to all people  
and to see in them what we all are:  
beloved of God.  
Amen.

### **2022 - People talk about their hunger**

People talk about their hunger,  
about misery and need.  
They report on their flight,  
of destruction and danger.

They cry and lament unheard.  
They suffer silently and unrecognised.

Let me ask them like Jesus  
What shall I do for you?  
Let me listen to them,  
Understand their thoughts and feelings.

Let us stand together.  
May you, God, be at our side.  
Amen.

### **2023 - When I meet a poor I say**

When I meet a poor I say: I can't give something to everyone,  
then you, God, say: I'm not talking about that either.

When I say: I don't have time now,  
You say: I have given you plenty of it.

When I say: I have no money left,  
You say: Give him a good word and a smile.

When I say: I don't know what he needs,  
you say: Ask him.

When I say: He can make an effort,  
you say: You don't even know him.

When I say: He just gets drunk,  
you say: I'll remind you at the next party.

When I say: He could at least have said thank you,  
you say: If you would have looked at him, you would have seen it in his eyes.

God, I want to listen to you,  
not in the next few days  
or tomorrow,  
but now.  
Now I want to give to the poor  
what he needs and  
what I can  
to my brother, to my sister  
as a sister, as a brother.

**2024 - They have no voice,**

They have no voice,  
the poor and marginalized of this earth.  
If they had a voice,  
I would hear them.  
But I hear nothing.

You, Lord, hear  
their low lamentations and their mute cries,  
their silent tears and their disappointed hopes,  
their invisible need and their great longing.  
But I do not hear it.

You, Lord, hear  
their accusations and their anger,  
their despair and their exhaustion,  
their sadness and their fear.  
But I do not hear.

But you, Lord, hear.  
That is why I ask you:  
Teach me to hear  
as you hear.

Amen.

## **Intercessions**

### **2019 The hope of the poor shall not perish forever**

#### **Rage**

I hate you! Why? Because you have everything I don't! You have a house, work, a car, enough to eat, people who love you. And me? I sit here on the street, walking through the city - without a destination. I'm looking for warmth, a dry place, a meal. I am looking for someone who speaks to me, who gives me a smile, who recognizes my dignity. But what do you do? You pass by. You do not pay attention to me. Avert your eyes. Turn up your nose.

Loving father, help me out of my misery. With you I find stability and warmth. Open people's hearts so that they may help me in my immediate need. And help me to give my life a positive turn.

#### **Greed**

To have, to have, to have! I want more, always more! The only thing that counts is me. Why do I care about my neighbour? The main thing is that I increase my property. Just distribution of goods? Why? Let him see for himself how he comes to wealth and prosperity. I am not interested in his lot at all.

Good father, you want all people to have enough to live. Nobody shall live at the expense of others. Everyone should have so much that a life in dignity is possible. Open our eyes, so that we can recognize where people suffer under our greed. Let us help where people suffer through the greed of others and do not have enough to live.

#### **Violence**

I'm stronger than you! I can make you small because I am the stronger one. By making you small, by making you feel my power, I feel big and powerful. You are only a useless worm.

People rise above others. There is torture, rape and abuse. Innocent, defenseless people suffer from the violence of their fellow human beings.

Loving father, stand at the side of the tortured. Give them strength so that the violence does not break their dignity and they receive a new chance in life.

Give the violent the insight that they are not masters of life and death. Let them see that violence is not the right way for human coexistence.

#### **Indifference**

What do I care about the old woman? Others should take care of her. The man there beats his wife and children? I also have problems. Let them get help elsewhere. Drugs, cigarettes, alcohol - bad for my health? I don't care. In this way I can at least escape the worries of my everyday life.

Merciful father, far too often we close our eyes to reality. We turn away when someone needs our help. Give us courage to help people in need. Help us to overcome our indifference so that life becomes possible in mutual esteem.

#### **Respectfulness**

You look different than me. You speak differently. I don't understand your culture, your customs and traditions. But I see that you are a human being. A person like me. You are loved by God as much as I am.

But there are always people who only pay attention to the opposites, who do not look at the person in you, but only at that what distinguishes me from you.

God, open our hearts to the otherness of my neighbour. Whether he is white, red, yellow or black, whether he speaks my language or not. Let me know that he is human and has the same dignity as I have.



### **Moderation**

Buy three and pay two! Take the XXL package! It hardly costs anything more. All you can eat! All inclusive! I want more and more and more.

A person is sitting on the street. His eyes look sad and empty. His clothes are dirty. His hair hasn't seen a hairdresser for ages.

Good father, I can allow myself more than many other people in my town, in my country, in this world. My life is more regulated than the lives of the homeless, the waif and the refugees. Teach me to be satisfied with what I have and to share with those who depend on the love of a neighbour.

### **Courage**

I feel helpless in the sight of all injustice, violence, war and misery. I am only one person. What can I really do? Is there not a need for influential organizations to take care of all these grievances?

I see a child being bullied by his classmates. An elderly person is harassed by young people at the bus station. A woman is harassed by young men. What should I do? What can I do? I am alone.

Loving father, often I lack the courage to stand up for my fellow men. I do not trust myself to intervene where my help would be necessary. Give me the courage to speak out when I see injustice. Let me intervene actively where a person needs my help. Take away my fear that something could happen to me. Stand by my side!

### **Living together**

None of us lives alone. We are integrated in our families, our circle of friends and acquaintances, in the circle of colleagues, classmates and fellow students, in religious communities. But not only that. We are part of our parishes, of the church worldwide. None of us can exist alone. Nothing is possible, if you don't help the others. Everyone means that even the less privileged belong to this circle, not only those who lead a good and successful life. All means that the person on the street is also a part of this whole.

Unifying Father, help us so that we do not forget that we are only a part of the whole. Help us to remember that all people on this earth are in your love and that we all build your kingdom together.

### **Sharing**

Five loaves of bread and two fish. With that you have fed 5000 and more. Jesus distributed bread and wine to his friends at the Last Supper. On his way through Israel he healed people through his words and deeds. He did not keep for himself the love you gave him, but gave it to all of us. Jesus is the model for us. That for everything we share, that we give to others our possessions become greater and greater. A candle consumes itself and makes our life bright. We give love and receive it back in many ways. Only if we give ourselves away, if we share our life and our love with others, can we grow.

Loving and merciful Father, give all people the knowledge that we can only become rich through sharing, that we become human when we give ourselves to other people.

## **2020 Stretch out your Hand to the Poor**

### **The boy with the cocoa beans**

The little boy's face is distorted and covered in sweat. The skin on his thin legs is grey and rough. He is carrying a sack of cocoa beans. The sack is heavy, but he must carry it, even if it is too heavy for him. For his family is poor, and so he has to earn his daily bread himself.

Lord, I eat chocolate - often, with pleasure and a lot. But I do not think of the children who work hard for it. Help me to look at them and act in such a way that they can have a troublefree childhood.

### **The woman at the sewing machine**

The woman sits at the sewing machine together with many others in a large hall for twelve or 14 hours. Fine dust swirls around and the air is stuffy. But there are still many T-shirts to be finished. She cannot take a break. She needs the money to be able to cook a meal for her children today.

Lord, I too buy cheap clothes without thinking about the inhumane conditions under which they are produced. Women, children and men work under unacceptable conditions for money that is barely enough to survive. Help me to look at these people so that they can lead a dignified life.

### **The man from the slaughterhouse**

Although he has slept for several hours, he is still tired. In his lodging he shares a small room with three other men. He cannot rest and recover there. But he has to send money to his family. Therefore he stands in the big cold hall and cuts up pig halves with big heavy machines again.

Lord, I go about my work, have a regular daily routine and can afford some nice things. My family is protected by a social network. Help me to look at these people so that they too can earn enough money for themselves and their families.

### **The family at the garbage dump**

Biting smoke is hanging on the air. It reddens the eyes of the family and makes it difficult to breathe. In particular the children suffer from it. But they all go out as they do every morning, looking in the garbage for things to sell. Maybe there is enough money today to buy cough syrup for the little ones. They will collect their food in the garbage, too.

Lord, I have a home, clean water and can buy healthy food. When I am ill, I go to the doctor and get the necessary medical care. Help me to focus on these people so that they can have access to clean housing, good food and adequate medical care, too.

### **The girl in the refugee camp**

She is a pretty girl with sparkling eyes and curly hair. She likes to laugh and is friendly to everyone. "She's something special," people say approvingly. "She deserves better," her parents say. They are worried and hope to leave the refugee camp soon.

Lord, people leave their homes because there is war, persecution because of their political or religious beliefs, or because of economically catastrophic circumstances. Help me to look at these people so that their situation in the refugee camps will change for the better and their life in their homeland will be worth living again.

### **The woman without glasses**

The old woman looks around searching. The young man looks nice, and she talks to him. "I forgot my glasses," she says. "Can you tell me what time the next bus will leave?" The young man is happy to help her. She is ashamed that she has lied to him, because she does not have glasses. She cannot afford them.

Lord, even in rich countries, people live in poverty. Often we do not see it. Help me to look at these people so that they can find a way out of their lives on the margins of society.

**The man at the steering wheel**

He finally found a parking space for the truck. Now he can take a break and call his family. He has not seen them in six weeks. In a few minutes, he will tell them that he is fine, as usual. The children believe him, but his wife hears the sadness in his voice and cries silently with him.

Lord, many people are separated from their families by their work. But there is no other way they can earn a living. Help me to look at these people so that their pain of being separated from their loved ones will not be too much for them.

**The family without papers**

They could live here, they told the young couple with their little child. Now they say they have to register the land for their hut. Just go to the office, pay a fee, show ID and that's it. It is as simple as that. But they have no ID. Nobody has one, here in the slums outside the megacity.

Lord, Mary and Joseph were looking for a place to rest after their long journey. Only a stable was given to them. So you were born in straw, among animals and dirt. Help me to look at the people who are looking for a way out of their misery and a humane place to live.

**The person who does not see the others**

He was really angry at his wife and kids. He had taken the trouble to bake some bread and they ate it without saying a word. And when he complained, his wife just said, "What's wrong? The baker does it every night."

Lord, often I do not appreciate what someone else is doing for me. I take much for granted, too. Help me to look at the people who do good to me, so I can thank them for everything.

## **2021 For the poor you have always with you**

### **Day 1**

When the other women spoke of her, they only said "the, well you know who". The men who came to her called her "my little dove" or "my deer". No one was interested in her name. But when she anointed Jesus' feet, she read her name in his eyes and wept with happiness.

Lk 7,36-50

Good God, you always know who we are and call us by our name. Let us respectfully call each other by name, for our name is indelibly written in your hand.

### **Day 2**

It was too late. He knew he could not undo or make up for anything he had done. His life would soon be over. But Jesus beside him on the cross looked at him differently than any man ever had before. So he dared to ask him, "Forget me not." And when Jesus said, "You will be with me," all the burden fell from him.

Lk 23,39-43

Good God, our lives are not always straight and without mistakes. Sometimes they weigh more heavily, sometimes they are only small, but still cause pain. Make our hearts ready to ask you for forgiveness, for you do not reject the repentant.

### **Day 3**

He was constantly torn, didn't know where from and where to. Sometimes he saw things one way, then another. He never knew who he was or what he wanted. He was lonely. "Legion," he would say when asked his name, "Legion, for we are many." That was until Jesus came and freed him to just be himself.

Mk 5,1-17

Good God, in this day and age we quickly lose ourselves. Everything is hectic, everything goes faster and faster. Let us find peace and realise that we can only find our true selves in our hearts.

### **Day 4**

He had almost got used to the fact that he was useless as a blind man. Begging was the only thing he could do. That's what everyone said. But when Jesus was near him, Bartimaeus felt that his life might be different after all. He dared and cried out for help. And while the others wanted to silence him, Jesus fulfilled his request.

Mk 10,46-52

Good God, we often go through our lives like blind men. We do not see what really matters. Let us cry out to you like Bartimaeus, for you open our eyes to real life.

**Day 5**

She knew that she could only put a little in the offering box. She gave it gladly, but she was also ashamed. That's why she didn't want anyone to see it, because everyone disregarded and pitied her, the widow. But one sentence of Jesus changed everything: "She gives more than you rich people." Now they were ashamed.

Mk 12,41-4

Good God, often we are stingy and do not want to share with others. Sometimes we may think that our small contribution will not make a difference. Open our hearts and hands to give what others need, no matter how little, because you give what is still needed in abundance.

**Day 6**

Levi knew that people sought his proximity because they hoped to gain an advantage. In order to pay less tax, they flattered him, although they actually despised him. But Jesus came to him and was his guest, because he saw what no other man saw: he saw Levi as he could be. From then on, he became Levi.

Mk 2,1-12

Good God, how often we play a role in front of others, we are not ourselves. But perhaps we are also pretending to ourselves. Open our eyes so that we can see who we really are and that you love us as we are.

**Day 7**

Almost all his life he had been waiting to get well again. He believed that the water of the pool of Bethesda could heal him, but he was alone and no one could carry him into the water. So everything remained as it was until Jesus came and asked him if he wanted to get well. But instead of carrying him into the water, he only said, "Get up and walk. You can do it."

Joh 5,1-18

Good God, I am sick. I don't have the strength to move to the healing waters. There is no one to help me. Open my ears so that I may hear your voice calling and healing me.

**Day 8**

Again and again they were sent away, not allowed to be with the adults and listen to Jesus. Yet he had been in town for hours and the children finally wanted to know more. They wanted to know if he was as different as they said. Yes, he was, for he called them and said, "Come and stay," and he blessed them.

Lk 18,15-17

Good God, you always have an open ear for children and welcome them with outstretched arms. Open our hearts so that we always realise that we must protect and love our children, for they are your gift to us.

**Day 9**

Sometimes it was hair-raising! How was that supposed to work? Countless people were there and they were hungry. There was no market far and wide where they could buy something. Now they were supposed to provide for all these people with a few loaves and fishes. What was Jesus thinking? But they just started - and there was enough for everyone.

Mk 6,35-44

Good God, I walk the streets of my city and see a homeless person on almost every corner. They are hungry, lonely and sick. Open my heart to give them what I have, to show them through me that you will not leave them alone.

## **2022 For your sakes Christ became poor**

### **The price stays the same - the bread gets smaller**

Nairobi/Kenya - Prices are rising worldwide. Bakers in the markets of Nairobi have to pay more for flour and energy. But they cannot sell their breads more expensively, because their customers also have less and less money in their wallets. So the bakers simply make the loaves smaller. "There is no other way," says Omoni M. and fears that he will soon have to charge more - for the smaller loaves.

Jesus, our brother, God with us in the markets of this world, have mercy on us.

### **Refugees and refugees**

Warsaw/Poland - Since the invasion of Russian troops into Ukraine, people have been seeking protection from the war in the countries of the European Union. They come mainly from the north and east of the country. But among them are also people from Africa and the Middle East. The people in Ukraine had given them shelter from hunger and the war in their home countries. Now they are all refugees. "We thought we were safe," say Olena S. and Mohamed A.

Jesus, our brother, God with us in the refugee camps of this world, have mercy on us.

### **Poor, but at least not hungry**

La Paz/Bolivia - More and more people are moving to the cities to escape poverty in the countryside. Only a few, like Diego O., stay in there. Although he is disappointed that he did not get enough money for his potato harvest to buy the school uniform for his daughter, he still returns. "It's hard to find work in the city too," he says, "but in the village at least we have potatoes and vegetables from our own fields and don't have to go hungry."

Jesus, our brother, God with us in the remote villages of this world, have mercy on us.

### **Drugs instead of rice**

New Delhi/India - Drug use is on the rise in parts of India. Those responsible see the development with concern, because it is not only the drug addicts who suffer, but also always their families. "Children steal money from their parents to buy drugs," says social worker Jasleen Y. "Then not infrequently the whole family goes hungry." Above all, she sees education as the key in the fight against drugs. "That's the only thing that leads out of misery."

Jesus, our brother, God with us in the drug-suffering families of this world, have mercy on us.

### **Death lurks in the fields**

Abuja/Nigeria - Many fields in the north of the country lie fallow. Terrorist militias or criminal gangs spread fear and terror in the villages. The people are defenceless against them. Solomon U. has stayed in his house since his son was shot on the way to the field. He wonders how to go on, because now he alone is responsible for his grandchildren. And they are hungry. So, despite all his fear, he will probably go to the field soon.

Jesus, our brother, God with us in the terror-stricken lands of this world, have mercy on us.

### **„Tafeln“ at their limit**

Berlin/Germany - "I wouldn't know what to do without the Tafel," says Paula W., packing her shopping bag. More and more people are feeling the same way since the prices for food and energy have been rising. Among them are more and more pensioners, but also many refugees from Ukraine. But Tafeln all over Germany are now reaching their limits, because the many people in need of help are being met by fewer and fewer donations.

Jesus, our brother, God with us in the aid organisations of this world, have mercy on us.

"Tafel" is a private initiative in Germany that gives food to those in need.

### **Death on prescription**

Washington/USA - Social workers regularly stop by in the bushes near the crossroads. In the camping tents live some people who have lost everything: their families, their homes, their health, their lives. "Back pain - that's where it started for many of them," explains social worker Ronald O. "That's why they got these pills from their doctor, and now they're a wreck." He and his colleagues check in regularly, call the ambulance if necessary, but unfortunately often the hearse.

Jesus, our brother, God with us with the people in the streets of this world, have mercy on us.

### **The water took everything**

Sydney/Australia - They have just put everything back together and now they have to watch their house sink again in the floodwaters. Henry S. is sitting in a lifeboat with his family. What they could still save is stowed in a few bags. The intervals between one flood and the next are getting shorter and shorter. "The climate," he says tonelessly, staring at the floods. "I wonder if we can rebuild our house again. We have nothing left. Nothing."

Jesus, our brother, God with us in the flood zones of this world, have mercy on us.

### **Give them food**

Berlin/Germany- Food trucks are at every festival and every self-respecting market. Exotic, vegan, hearty, fiery - there is something for every taste, but not for every budget. "Nobody should go hungry," says Anna B. and continues to chop vegetables in her food truck. Once a week, she and her partner Mark T. cook for the needy and homeless. "All enthusiastic customers," the two are pleased to say.

Jesus, our brother, God with us in the helping people of this world, have mercy on us.

All reports are inspired by reports in the media, but otherwise freely invented.



**2023 Do not turn your face away from anyone who is poor**

See Impuls

## **2024 The prayer of the poor rises up to God**

### **The Sewing Woman**

I work in a factory 14 hours a day. It's hot and stuffy there. But I have to earn money. Otherwise my children have nothing to eat. But I can't buy them clothes, even though I sew them every day. They're for people in foreign countries. The air there is certainly better than here. There's dust everywhere. I can't breathe properly and my back hurts too. But if I don't go to the factory, my children will starve. Do you know that, God? Well, I've told you now. I hope you listened to me. Please tell people that I need more money, not to get rich, but to live.

### **The Lorry Driver**

I know that the tread on my truck tyres is no longer good. It's dangerous to drive on them. For me and for everyone else on the road too. But new tyres are expensive. Very expensive. Road tolls are high everywhere, and petrol costs more and more. That doesn't leave much for my family at the end of the month, no matter how many journeys I've made. But I can't save up for new tyres when my boy needs new shoes and my little girl needs a new dress. They are children after all. They just grow. God, can't you just say loud and clear that this isn't possible? Hard work - good wages, that's the only right way.

### **The Farm Labourer**

My skin is always inflamed. That makes me tired. Sometimes I also have fever. It's this liquid that I have to spray on the roses. The roses mustn't get sick. They always have to look beautiful, otherwise they can't be sold. And if they're not sold, then I have no work. There is protective clothing for this work, but my boss says it's too expensive. The roses don't pay enough for him to be able to afford it. I don't know if that's true. All I know is that the work makes me ill. Lord, can't that be changed? At least a little, so that I'm no longer ill? Maybe then I'd like roses again.

### **The Slaughter's Assistant**

Why did I go to school and always study hard? That's the question I always ask myself when I have to get up in the middle of the night to 'stall out'. I didn't learn what that is at school. I suspect that the teachers don't know what it is either. I have to catch chickens in their coop in the middle of the night so that they can be taken to the slaughterhouse. There are a lot of animals and not much time. It's torture - for me and for the animals. But I didn't get any other work, even though I was promised a good job. What are you promising me, God? Do you even know me? Are you interested in how I'm doing?

### **The Seafarer**

The wages haven't been paid again, and we're not allowed to leave the ship either. At least I've been able to call my wife and children. They get by because they get money from my parents. People help each other in the family; that's the way it is. But it still torments me. I work a lot, I'm at sea for months at a time. But the money doesn't come into my account. I'm supposed to get it when I go back ashore, when I'm back home. If I insist on getting the money now, I won't get hired again. What am I supposed to do? Do you know what to do, God?

### **The Pensioner**

I always set off early in the morning so that nobody can see me. And I drive to a different part of town so that nobody recognises me. After all, everyone knows that I've always worked as a shop assistant and they think I can have a rest now that I'm retired. I would like that too. But my pension is small. It's just enough for rent, electricity and food. I can't afford a new coat or even a new fridge. I even have to save up for a coffee with an old friend. So I collect returnable bottles in places where nobody knows me. But what will happen when I can no longer collect bottles? God, will you take care of me then?

**The Seasonal Worker**

The room I sleep in is smaller than the bathrooms in the holiday resort where I work. That's fine, because I want to save up so that my boyfriend and I can get married next year. But now the rent for the small room has gone up. Shopping is also expensive, because everyone has to pay the prices that are actually made for tourists. That's why I told my boyfriend that we can't get married yet. The wedding, the new flat - we'll have to save for another year. We both know that there's no other way, but we're still incredibly sad. Did you hear me crying tonight, God?

**The Geriatric Nurse**

I don't know why the old men and women are here. My boss says that they wouldn't be as well looked after in their home country as they are here. That may be true because I look after the old people all day and all night, seven days a week. Once a year I can go to my village for a fortnight and visit my family. The work is hard. The old people are weak and need help with everything, really everything. I'm dead tired in the evenings and I'm afraid I won't wake up when someone needs me. I would love to go back to my family, but they need the money. Will that ever be different? Can you tell me, God?

**The Refugee**

Just a few weeks ago, my wife and I were able to give a piece of bread to a beggar who knocked on our door. Today, we hold out our own hands in the refugee camp to get some flour and oil. When a rebel group marched on our town, the government bombed our neighbourhood. They said the rebels were there. Instead of protecting us, they destroyed our houses and turned us into homeless beggars. We are safe in the refugee camp and we thank the people who took us in. But who will stop the powerful and greedy who are destroying and seizing everything? Can you do it, God?

## Impulse

### **2018 - One who heard the crying: Julia Greeley**

A big hat and a red handcart were the trademarks of Julia Greeley. The people in Denver (USA) already called her "angel of the poor" during her lifetime. Julia Greeley was neither rich nor beautiful, so none - as we would say today - "Charity Lady". Born a slave between 1833 and 1845, she already lost her right eye when she was a child, as she was struck by a whip that had been meant for her mother. After the American Civil War, she worked as a domestic helper for various wealthy white families. Although she was poor herself, she helped everyone as best she could. If her money was not enough, she asked for donations. She brought food, clothing or coal to the needy with a red handcart. Knowing that it was embarrassing for white poor to accept black help, she went to them at night so that the neighbours would not see it. She was supported by her Christian faith and found strength in prayer. She was a committed member of her parish and of the Third Order of the Franciscans. The "Angel of the Poor" died in Denver on 7 June 1918. She is still unforgotten and was the first person to be buried in Denver Cathedral in the summer of 2018.

When I first read about Julia Greeley, I was particularly impressed by her commitment, even though she was not a rich woman and life had marked her. Surely she could have sat back and said that others are better and that they should help. But she did not. She saw the need of the people and helped. She made no distinction between old and young, black and white. A biographer wrote that there were also people who obtained alms from her. Julia Greeley was of the opinion, however, that it was better to always give than to be too careful and thereby deny help to those in need. Another point that deeply impressed me. Even being alone did not stop her from being there for people. She proved that even a "one-person society," as a journalist called her after her death, can make a big difference.

Julia Greeley - a extraordinary woman with a big heart worth thinking about.

## 2019 - A Divided Military Coat And A Breadbasket Full of Roses

The legends of the lives of St. Martin and St. Elisabeth are well known: On a cold winter night the Roman soldier Martin (316-397) shares his coat with a beggar in whom he recognizes Christ later. The breadbasket of Duchess Elisabeth of Thuringia (1207-1231) miraculously contains red roses instead of bread for the poor so her husband no longer criticizes her for her efforts. It is a good thing that the celebrations of their days are celebrated in November such as the World Day of the Poor\*. The division of the coat and the miracle of the roses provide are an inspiration for our commitment to the poor today.

*To see need and to act* - Martin does not ask why the beggar is poor, why he sits somewhere on the side of the road and not where he could find shelter. He does not consider starting a collection of old coats and distributing them to the needy when he is back in the army camp. Martin sees the man in the cold and spontaneously shares his coat with the beggar.

*Give as much as necessary* - Martin does not give the whole coat, he shares it. In this way both have enough protection against the cold of the night. Martin does not solve all the problems the beggar could have. His help is here and now, and it helps both of them: The beggar does not freeze to death and Martin recognizes his way to Christ.

*Continue despite criticism* - Elisabeth was severely criticized by her family for her commitment to the poor but it did not stop her. How far commitment for the poor can and may go is often fiercely disputed in family and society. The answer to the question of the right measure must be given again and again so that nobody has to live in poverty.

*God opens the eyes of others* - Elisabeth's husband sees roses in the breadbasket. Whether bread was actually transformed into roses is a question that each one must answer for himself. In any case the roses are a wonderful symbol for the beauty of Elisabeth's deeds which her husband recognizes and acknowledges.

*Setting an example* - Martin and Elisabeth acted out of their faith and were an example to many people. There have always been people like Martin and Elisabeth, even today - and anyone can be.

\*St. Martin: November 11; St. Elisabeth: November 19; World Day of the Poor: Sunday before Christ the King (between 13 and 19 November)

## 2020 - Why?

The new classmate had only a plastic bag for his school supplies. His family is poor, said one teacher in a low voice, but so high that everyone heard. All were quiet and pretended not to have seen or heard anything. They were embarrassed. No one spoke to the boy, who always looked down.

Joseph thought about it all afternoon. Finally, in the evening, he went to his father. - "Why are some rich and some poor?" he asked him. - "Because some are hardworking and some are lazy," his father said. - "But the man in the market works hard," Joseph said, "yet his clothes are old and worn out." - "Oh, I don't know," his father grumbled, shook his head and continued to read his book.

Joseph then asked his big brother: "Why are some rich and some poor?" - "Because some are thieves and rob the others," his elder brother said. - "But stealing is not allowed," Joseph said. - "Oh man, you are naive," his elder brother said, smiled softly and put the headphones back on.

In the living room Joseph met his mother. "Why are some rich and some poor?" Joseph asked her. - "I don't know," replied his mother. - "But there must be a cause," said Joseph. - "Yes," she said thoughtfully, "there must be one. Let's talk about it."

Then she made tea, put biscuits on the table and they talked for a long time.

*The motto of the World Day of the Poor 2020 "Stretch out your hand to the poor" is taken from the book of Jesus Sirach (Sir 7:32). There you can also read "My son, do not deprive the poor of his livelihood" (Sir 4:1) and "Bow your ear to the poor and greet him kindly". (Sir 4,8).*

*Why not make a pot of tea, put biscuits on the table and talk to others about the advice of the old wisdom teacher Jesus Sirach. And who knows, maybe you will continue writing the story "Why?" later?*

## **2021 – Lockdown**

Anyone who walked through the street of Germany's cities during the days of the first lockdown in spring 2020 saw the streets and squares more deserted than ever before. "Stay at home" - everyone followed this advice as best as they could.

It was the same in my hometown. I remember one afternoon when my husband and I went to the main railway station. Only a few people were out like us, but on the street corners and in the station square we met homeless people and drug addicts as usual. There were probably no more than on other days, but they were more visible that day than ever before. There was no crowd to hide them from view, and there was no one to see them either. Some were wandering aimlessly, others were sitting near the entrances, angry and shouting at each other. No one gave them any money and the shops were closed. They lacked the basic needs to survive that day. Their desperation was tangible.

"You always have the poor with you." But what if we are not with the poor? I did not find an answer to that question that day. However, some people in my hometown gave an answer in those days: they packed bags of food and hung them on fences and railings in various places in the city. There homeless and needy people could take what they needed.

The poor are always with us and we are with them.

### **Do you know anyone who is poor?**

Mister Kargas was completely lost in thought when he was suddenly approached by a journalist in the middle of the shopping street. She held out a large microphone to him and asked, "Do you know anyone who is poor?"

Mister Kargas kept silent and thought about what to do. At first he wanted to go on, but then stopped. "Why do you want to know?" he finally asked.

"We are doing a feature on the new poverty report," she explained, "to be broadcast tonight."

Mister Kargas nodded. "I just saw a beggar," he muttered. "But I don't know him, of course."

The cameraman came closer and took a close-up of Mister Kargas. He took a step back.

"Maybe you do know someone," the journalist said. "In your neighbourhood? Or maybe even in your family? Think about it."

Mister Kargas thought. He saw some faces in front of him: the face of a dead-tired young woman he met in the evening when he took his dog for a walk and that of an old man who regularly looked for deposit bottles in the waste bin at the bus stop. Were they poor? Probably. But he didn't know them. The journalist was getting impatient. "Well?" she asked.

"I'm sorry," said Mister Kargas "I don't know anyone. But thank you for your question. I will change that now."

"What?" she asked, astonished, as the cameraman withdrew again.

"Well, I will soon know people who are poor. I just have to meet them first." Without waiting for a reply, Mister Kargas went on his way, determined to greet the young woman and the old man from now on. As a start.

Mister Kargas went ahead with his plan. He began to greet the young woman and the old man in a friendly manner. Soon the young woman returned his greeting. A slight nod of the head became a clearly audible "Good evening" and after a while a smile was added. The old man, however, did not seem to see or hear him. Mister Kargas nevertheless continued to greet him.

One evening - he was out with his dog Mirco as usual - he went to "Claus Büdchen" to buy another bottle of beer. It was exceptionally quiet that evening and Claus was bored. He invited Mister Kargas in for a beer and they drank and chatted at a bar table in front of the entrance door.

Claus, who wasn't actually called Claus, but was called that after his kiosk - well, Claus knew everyone within a radius of at least 500 metres. He told Mister Kargas that the owners of the pizzeria at the other end of the street were expecting their fifth child, that the gaunt woman who always sat at the bus stop was not only mourning her husband but was also angry with him because he had been buried at sea and now she couldn't visit a grave, and that the old woman with that strikingly coloured shopping trolley had moved in with her daughter a few days ago.

Mister Kargas asked him about the young woman and the old man.

"Oh him," Claus said, "he's a loner. Quirky and taciturn. For a long time I thought he couldn't talk at all. But once, when a child almost hit him with the bicycle, he cursed and swore, you can't imagine. Neither of us speak such words."

"And the wife?" inquired Mister Kargas.

"Ah her. Good soul. Works her butt off for the family. Her husband's been out of work for a while. He's a bit strange, but he takes good care of the little daughter. It's not easy for either of them."

A cold evening wind was now blowing through the streets. Mister Kargas said goodbye, but bought another packet of cigarettes before finally leaving.

"Since when do you smoke?" wondered Claus.

"I don't," Mister Kargas replied. "These are for a homeless man in a bus stop shelter. I always see him on my way to work. He sits there, picks up the butts from the street and then lights them. It's just disgusting."

Claus looked at him in surprise at first, but then he smiled.

"It makes me really sick," Mister Kargas added.

But he could clearly see that Claus did not believe him. His eyes said, 'I know. The poor devil deserves a whole pack.'



They wished each other a good night, and while Mister Kargas went home, he thought about what Claus would say to the journalist if she asked him "Do you know a good person?". He was afraid he would say, "He was just here."

But the journalist would never come to this neighbourhood and above all never ask such a question. Mister Kargas breathed a sigh of relief and contentedly unlocked his flat door.

Katharina Johann

## 2023 - Mrs Kruse's Think-About-It-Jars

Benno waved at his parents from the window until the car had turned the corner of the street. On the kitchen table was the box his father had given him. "From Mrs Kruse," he had said. "You remember her, don't you? She's moved into a home for elderly now. She asked me to give you this. She thought you could do something with it." They had talked briefly about the old neighbour, but then everything had turned to Benno's sister's upcoming wedding. So the box had remained unnoticed on the kitchen table. But now Benno opened it.

Inside the box were an exercise book and nine preserving jars. He took one of them in his hand and remembered that he had seen the jars at Mrs Kruse's many years ago. He had been twelve or thirteen years old and had helped her with something from time to time. He had also seen the jars, each containing an object: a coin or a key. He had wondered and then asked what kind of jars they were.

"Each jar is my personal think-about-it jar," she had explained. "The glasses remind me that there are people who have a hard life and that I must not lose sight of them."

Why they had not talked about it further at the time, Benno no longer knew. After all, it had been more than ten years. He put the glass back and opened the notebook. In sweeping script, the first page read "The story about the jar". Then followed nine entries, each headed with the object in the jar. Benno took the jars out of the box and placed them in the order in which the stories were written down at the end of his kitchen table.

"Tomorrow," he murmured wearily. "Tomorrow I will read the stories, dear Mrs Kruse. I promise!"

### Key

A few days ago I went for a walk and took a break at the playground near the church. At some point, a young woman sat down next to me on the bench. She was thin and had a pale grey face. Her hair was dull and her clothes washed out. In short - you could see that life had not been kind to her so far and lack of money was her constant companion. She had two children, about three and five years old. They gave her a chip packet and then ran to the sandbox.

"Usually they don't get chips," she said to me and put the packet in a plastic bag.

I didn't know what to answer, but she didn't seem to expect an answer either. She took a Coke bottle out of the bag and drank a big gulp.

"Real Coke," she said with satisfaction. "It's too expensive, actually. But today is a celebration day."

"Birthday?" asked I.

"Better!" she replied, beaming at me. "See over there? The windows at the top? That's my new flat! We moved in today!" All of a sudden, a pretty young woman sat next to me. "When I had the little one," she went on, "I was kicked out of the flat. No more coal. At first I stayed with this or that person. But with two small children - that's not possible. Then the social welfare office gave me a room. It was a kind of assisted living. I really wanted to leave. And now! Now I have my own flat for me and the kids!"

I congratulated her.

"Thank you! Wish me good luck," she begged and stood up. "I might be able to work a few hours at the kiosk over there."

I wished her well from the bottom of my heart.

A flat of my own - that had always been a matter of course for me. I sat there for a while, lost in thought, and then gratefully went home.

### **Cash Receipt**

Today I was in the little bar on the market square, enjoying the first warm spring day. Two women were sitting at the next table. The tables are very close, so I could hear what they were saying, even if I didn't want to. Their names were Susanne and Alex, and they were chatting about family, work and summer holidays.

After the waiter had taken their order, Susanne said, "He sure looks tired."

Alex looked at her in irritation. "Who?"

"It's just too much," Susanne said, "working in the kiosk during the day and then here in the evening."

"Who are you talking about?" Alex had no idea.

"Well, the waiter," her friend replied. "Didn't you see that he has rings under his eyes?"

Alex shook her head. "I don't know. I don't even know what colour his hair is or if he wore glasses."

They were silent for a moment and then went back to talking about this and that.

From that moment on I sat very quietly next to them. When they had left and the waiter came to clear the table, I asked him for the bill. The young man had short dark hair, didn't wear glasses and looked really very tired. I paid, silently wished him a better-paid job and aloud a good evening.

### **Devil**

This story comes from my brother. He lives with his family in northern Germany. We don't see each other often, but we often talk on the phone. Today he told me that he had been out with his grandson Tobias to buy a birthday present for grandma.

Suddenly Tobias said to him, "Grandpa, now you're going to hell!"

He was so surprised that he stopped in the middle of the road and just looked at him.

"You didn't give anything to that beggar there," Tobias said.

My brother wanted to know why he would go to hell for that. Tobias explained to him that they had just heard a story in religion class about a rich man and poor Lazarus. The rich man had never given anything to the poor man and had ended up in hell for it. "I don't want you to go there," he said.

My brother had tears in his eyes when he told me this. I could hear it in his voice.

He gave Tobias an Euro and sent him to the beggar. Then he promised him to be more careful next time and never to pass a beggar again. "These little ones," he said to me in conclusion, "they always teach a lesson to such an old man as me."

He is very proud of his Tobias, and he can be!

### **Seed Bag**

Near the supermarket there is a tree right on the pavement. A few years ago, flowers were planted all around it. A real treasure. But then everything went overgrown and finally dried up in summer. My neighbour told me that a family had taken care of it, but they had moved. Now there are flowers again, and I asked the cashier at the supermarket who was doing it.

"Do you know Toni? The homeless guy?" she asked me, and I wondered what that had to do with the flowers.

"Well, when Toni gets enough money," she continued, "he comes in and buys food and beer too. But do you know what else he buys? You'll never guess." She paused for a moment and then said, "Seed bags!"

"What does he do with them?" I asked, realising immediately that it was a stupid question.

"Well, he dug up the soil under the tree with something and then poured the sachets out there. Looks pretty, doesn't it?" She pressed a button on the till and told me what I had to pay.

I wanted to know how he watered the flowers, but she didn't know. "Oh, Toni," she said, "when he wants something, he manages it. Somehow."

A few days later, I saw him coming from the playground, heavy with plastic bottles. He went to the tree with them and watered the flowers. So he had filled empty water bottles at the hydrant with

water! But it wasn't only me who saw this, but also the baker who has his shop on the other side of the street. Toni now gets water for the flowers and the tree from him. Homeless people only drink and don't care about anything. Quick judgement - wrong judgement, that's what Toni taught me.

### **Matchbox**

It's been a long time since I read about a matchbox of tea in a novel. I don't know why, but today it came back to me as I was filling a packet of tea into the pretty box. Of course, I don't know if I remember correctly, but I can't look it up again. I gave the book on as a gift many years ago. In my memory the story goes like this:

In some town in Africa a street boy is living on a roof and getting by more poorly than he can. A man takes care of him a little. He works in the bakery on whose roof the boy sleeps. One day, the boy falls seriously ill. He is freezing. So the man goes to get a blanket. He cannot buy one, because he has no money. So he borrows one for a few days. The rental fee for the blanket is a matchbox of tea.

One matchbox of tea - that should be enough for two office cups. Two cups of tea for a borrowed blanket. What would it cost to buy a blanket? Or what would it cost to visit a doctor? Both certainly unaffordable for the man and many others!

That's what went through my mind at the time.

Now I have taken an empty matchbox and filled it with tea.

What a treasure!

### **Paper Cup**

My neighbour walked up the stairs in front of me, lugging two six-packs of small water bottles.

"A lift wouldn't be bad," she said, wiping the sweat from her forehead. "But it keeps you fit, doesn't it?"

"You're right about that, but the older I get, the more I'd like one. Especially when the shopping is heavy," I countered, pointing to the bottles.

"Oh, whatever," she said and continued walking. "It is what it is, and in this hot weather you have to drink a lot."

I muttered a "True" and wondered why she had bought water bottles. Hadn't she once told me that piped water was quite enough? I didn't want to ask. I was tired, and really it was none of my business. A few days later - it was still hot - I met a courier at the front door. He was lugging a heavy package and groaning under the load.

"Never lift when need," he grumbled. "But woman second floor good."

"Do you often have to visit my neighbour?" I asked, following him up the stairs.

He didn't answer and concentrated entirely on the steps. Arriving on the second floor, my neighbour was already waiting for the courier. I greeted her and unlocked my flat door.

"Welcome to Gartenstraße 4 parcel station," she said with a laugh. "If I took a storage fee, I'd be rich." The courier placed the parcel in her hallway and she acknowledged receipt. Before the man hurried down the stairs, she gave him one of the small water bottles. The man stumbled and murmured, "Thank you, Madame."

"My mother used to do that," she said, looking at me almost shamefacedly. "It's so hot today."

I would have liked to say something appropriate, but as so often, I couldn't think of anything. So I just nodded, smiled and wished her a good day. I should have said a good word to her. What is so difficult about that?

## **Coin**

It's strange. Whenever I'm asked about my trip to Rome, this experience is the first thing that comes into mind, but I don't tell about it.

My friend and I had left early in the morning to be able to look at the Forum Romanum in a leisurely way and to escape the heat. On the way, we passed a small green area. Between the bushes and the path sat a homeless man who called out a friendly „Good morning“ to us.

"Good marketing strategy," my friend said and grinned.

We stopped, both took a few lire out of our pockets and gave him the money.

"Mille grazie! Thank you! Danke! Merci!" he rattled off and laughed.

We now saw that there was a man lying behind him, asleep. I was about to move on, but my friend took a step towards the bushes and put some lire on a plastic bag lying next to the sleeping man.

Astonished, the man looked at her and began to shake his buddy awake. He spoke to him, and although I don't understand Italian, it was clear to me what he wanted: to thank my friend. But he didn't wake up and just grumbled angrily.

"It's okay," my friend said, "Ciao."

We continued on our way. The man called after us some more what sounded like good wishes in several languages.

"I bet," my friend said, "he won't steal his buddy's money."

I agreed with her. "A real buddy, that's what he is."

## **Thermometer**

The bus was late, as it often is, which particularly annoyed me the day before yesterday because it was very cold. It was still early and there was fog all over the station square. There was hoarfrost on the trees. I was freezing. Somewhere a man was talking very loudly, but still I only understood one word: No. I looked around and spotted him a few metres away on another bus platform. He was standing there with a woman and gesticulating. Both looked unkempt and I wasn't sure if they weren't drunk too. The woman wanted to leave, he held her back. I looked and listened more closely.

"What do we care," the woman said. "He's an adult." She tore herself away from him.

"But it's cold," the man said. "We have to do something."

Now I saw that they were standing by a man who was stretched out long on his back. His clothes were worn and dirty.

"He's drunk," the woman said.

"Never mind," the man said and crouched down beside him. He shook his shoulder. "Get up," he called, "you can't lie here. It's too cold."

The woman walked on, grumbling, while the man remained crouching helplessly on the floor, trying to get the man awake.

An elderly gentleman walked up to the two. "I've called an ambulance," he said in a calm voice. "They'll be here in a minute."

The man stood up, nodded and walked after the woman. The elderly gentleman, however, stopped by the man lying on the ground and waited. Shortly afterwards, the siren was heard.

## **Song Sheet**

There were only a few people on the shopping street. Yet they were hurriedly running from shop to shop, or maybe just because of that. On such an empty street, I didn't feel comfortable either and walked with quick steps towards the mall. On the way there, I saw a woman sitting on the floor, looking around quietly. Then she sat up straight, brushed her hair out of her face and sang. She had a beautiful and full voice. It were happy songs I didn't know, but I liked them.

It took me a while to do my shopping. When I left the mall, she was still sitting on the street and singing. I stood near the entrance for a while and listened. Then I went to her, put some coins on the paper plate and thanked her. She didn't interrupt her song, but nodded at me with a smile.

I made my way home, and her singing accompanied me. Suddenly it broke off. I turned around and saw two men from the Office for Public Order talking to her. She stood in front of them and talked at them, but they always just shook their heads.

I went back.

"Go now," I heard one of them say as I approached. Grumbling, the woman went on her way. The men turned and walked in my direction. A moment later I was with them and I addressed them.

"Did you send the woman away?"

"Yes. People were complaining," they said.

"She was just singing. Who can that bother?"

The two shrugged their shoulders. "She's always bothering. We know her. She's in a lot of places downtown and gets pushy," they explained.

"But now she was just sitting in the street singing," I objected.

"But still," both said.

"I want you to know that she didn't bother all the people. Me, for example. I liked her songs."

"Well, then. Have a nice day," they replied and left me standing.

And I wondered if songs only bother people when the singer wears a bright dress and a colourful headscarf.

## 2024 - The Story of King Different

Like every day, the rich and beautiful came into the magnificent audience hall on this sunny morning. As usual, they gossiped about new clothes and jewellery, about success and travel, about the stupidity of others and the wisdom of themselves. At some point, they realised that the king had not appeared. They agreed that this was an impertinence. You wouldn't keep people like them waiting! The master of ceremonies was nowhere to be seen either. What an impertinence, they thought. What was going on in this kingdom? It couldn't mean anything good.

Finally, a servant came, stood in front of the throne and announced that the king would not be coming today, tomorrow or the day after. So they should please go home. They didn't let a servant, even if he was a servant of the king, tell them anything, but as the king didn't come, they left in a fury.

For a while, the rich and beautiful visited each other. At these meetings, they talked about what they had usually talked about in the audience hall and then went home. They waited for the kingdom to collapse, because in their opinion it would have to if the king no longer received them in audience.

But the kingdom did not collapse. The king passed laws, appointed ministers, set new tax levels, held talks with neighbouring countries and - he held audiences. For a long time, the rich and beautiful were unaware of this. Gradually, however, their stable boys, chambermaids, kitchen boys and laundresses knew where the king was holding audiences. Once he had gone to the women at the well from which they fetched water day after day. Another time he had ridden to the farmers in the fields, but on a donkey so as not to embarrass them with his magnificent white horse. "On a donkey," laughed the rich and beautiful. "What a fool!" And from then on they only called him King Fool.

The stable boys and chambermaids, the kitchen boys and the laundresses continued to marvel at their king when they heard that he had been to a carpenter's garage or to the fishermen on the big lake. They knew that one day he would come to them in the stable or the laundry room and they only called him "King Different".

One day, the king rode to the rich and beautiful, who were gathered in one of the most magnificent houses in the kingdom. He rode on his white horse and was dressed elegantly, but without pomp. He radiated royal dignity and humility in equal measure. When he arrived, everyone fell silent, made way for him and stared at him impassively. No one dared to say anything, but everyone wondered why he hadn't announced his visit. Then they could have dressed differently. And anyway, what was that all about? What was he doing here?

The king waited patiently. He was handed a glass of wine, but even after he had finished it in peace, no one said a word. Finally, a servant broke the silence as he poured the king more wine.

"Excuse me, Sir," he said quietly, but so that everyone could hear, "they don't know what an audience means."

"I thought so," said the king and slowly stood up. "So be it then. I have heard enough."

From that day on, King Different stopped coming to see them. Did they know that they could come to him at the well or the garage at any time? He hoped so. But everyone else knew that he would continue to come to them and listen to them.