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Father Jordan and the Poor

When invited to write on the theme of our Founder and his love of the poor and the meaning it has for my own life as a Salvatorian, I immediately went to his *Spiritual Diary* and his *Chapter Talks* to see what I might learn. To my surprise, while there is a great deal about Fr. Jordan's somewhat urgent commitment to "poverty" as an essential for religious life, hardly anything is said directly about his love for and relationship to poor people. Nevertheless, there are a few "hints" that point to the Founder's regard for the poor. A primary one is found in the *Chapter Talks* where Jordan says: ". . . when we see the destitute, the most abandoned, lowest person, that we see in him an immortal soul for whom Christ died and shed his blood – whose beauty is so great that St. Catherine said she would gladly die a hundred times to rescue just one. So let us look and see that each human being is an image of God!" (1898/02/18) In other words, Jordan sees beyond an individual's state of life to the inner divine presence of the God. Each person is an icon of the loving God. St. James reminds us in his letter: "Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him?" (James 2:5) I recently returned from my vacation in New York City. Once again I was made aware of the poverty of the homeless living on the streets. I have to confess that although my heart goes out to them, I usually just walk by them. One day a man who was living on the streets came up to me. I thought to myself: "Well here comes another street person asking for money." Instead, he smiled at me and shook my hand, wished me a good day and then walked on. I felt moved by his greeting and at that moment, he was no longer just a street person begging for money but a human being, a child of God who is loved by God. It makes a big difference when we realize that God wants ALL his children to be with him in the Kingdom one day. This suggests that as a Salvatorian, called to bring the goodness and kindness of the Savior to ALL people, I need to keep this truth in mind as a means of fostering a disposition of compassion and inclusiveness, like that of the Founder.

As mentioned before, Fr. Jordan places a great deal of focus on the external practice of poverty by members, especially in his *Chapter Talks*. Many of the practices seem out of date and even childish to us today such as not carrying any money in one's pocket, asking permission of the house superior to buy a personal item and confessing a breach in the vow of poverty by spending without permission. Certainly, the Founder's pressing need to attend to the often dire financial straits of the young Society justified his preoccupation with how the vow of poverty was lived out by the members. But I believe that there is another and maybe deeper reason for Jordan's approach to the vow. If we are to be credible in our proclamation of the poor and humble Savior, aren't we called to reflect his life by the way we live our own lives? It must be admitted that this is challenging when we live in a culture, such as that of the U.S., where success is measured by who has the most, the biggest and the best. While avoiding carrying money in our pocket may not be the answer to meeting this challenge, cultivating a willingness to periodically examine our life style and asking what are even the smallest changes that we can make to simplify our way of living as individuals and as a community can help. Fr. Jordan reminds us that the simple life calls for the formative disposition of trust - trust in the Divine Providence of God. In

his talk given June 15, 1894, Jordan said: *“You surely know, the greater the trust the more one will receive from God. In all our poverty we look to God from whom we seek our help.”* The fruit of this trust is a greater confidence in God and the Society which enables us to live a simpler life style. This, in turn, brings us closer to the people we are called to serve. In other words, Jordan’s call to live Holy Poverty challenges me to explore how my life style can set up barriers from being one with the people, especially the poor, whom I have been called to serve and into whose lives I try to bring the Savior’s love. May our Founder’s example help us to cultivate a genuine love of the poor and a simpler approach to the way we live our lives in the world today.

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