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|  | **Poverty, Hunger And Homelessness:*****“For I was hungry and you gave me food…”*** |
| What’s the Point? | Jesus tells us two things: “Blessed are you who are poor,” (*Lk* 6:20) and “*The poor you will always have with you*.” (*Mt* 26:11) What does it take to reconcile these two thoughts? What do they mean? How we define poverty, how it fits into the Common Good, and what prejudices we hold towards the poor is important for the teens to grasp in order to understand how to address it with both feet.  |
| **Background Information** | ***Reference**** ***CCC****: ¶* *520; 2402; 2443-9; 2544-7*
* **NAB** : *Sir 4:1-6;* *Mk 10:17-31; Mt 19:16-30*

How do we help the poor if there are people who are poor because they deserve it? The alcoholic bum, begging for money; the “welfare queen” demanding support; the thief stealing without care; the individuals who allow themselves to be dominated by abusive people and governments; the addict, the lazy, the mentally challenged. How do we view poverty? How do we understand what it is? When we look at the systemic causes of poverty we must come up with a definition of poverty, not a socio-economic theory of marketplaces and resources, but in human terms of compassion and a desire to do God’s will. We must first challenge our preconceived notions and biases in order to come to an understanding as God understands.So where do we look to find the foundation for our understanding? Well fortunately for us we do not have to look far. “*In all of his life Jesus presents himself as* our model*. He is ‘the perfect man, (Cf. Jn 13:15; Lk 11:1; Mt 5:11-12) who invites us to become his disciples and follow him. In humbling himself, he has given us an example to imitate, through his prayer he draws us to pray, and by his poverty he calls us to accept freely the privation and persecutions that may come our way.*”(*CCC* 520)That last bit, “*and by his poverty he calls us to accept freely the privation and persecutions*” is an indication of how we should view poverty. Francis of Assisi owned this statement. But how does that apply to other’s poverty. Certainly we can invite them to feel good about their poverty but we fall into James’ admonition: “*and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well,’ but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is it?*” (*Jm* 2:16) It is not our place then to tell the poor how to feel about their poverty, but it is our place to decide how we feel about our own poverty. Only once we are humbly able to embrace poverty can we begin to address poverty. After we understand the spiritual virtue of poverty, we are able to address its opposite: poverty as sin, as privation, as lack of basic needs.And that is the poverty we define here. The poverty of needs not of wants. Many want to define poverty by wants. Certainly it can be argued that most of the poor in this country are rich compared to 90% of the world’s population. At the same time their poverty is relative to our wealth. We must take our perception of the problem out of the weeds. If we break it down by ratios of rich to wealthy to poor, within America and against America, the gap remains pretty constant: the difference between those-who-have compared to those-who-have-not is large.If poverty is a spiritual virtue, then poverty must not be something that is an occasion of sin. This is not the predatory, free action of theft ‘justified’ by poverty occasion of sin, but poverty which causes despair, loss of dignity, driving one to adopt an equally brutal and selfish attitude toward those who have, and even those who have not. This addresses the crimes of ‘rich’ against ‘poor’, of ‘poor’ against ‘rich’, and ‘poor’ against ‘poor’ (think drugs).Poverty of the Beatitudes, which is a blessing, is poverty which earns us the Kingdom of God. The poverty of sin only serves to advance evil’s agenda. The measure of our complicity in the poverty of sin is measured at the level we do not embrace the spiritual virtue. So let us think about this in terms of grace and sin. True freedom, the doing of God’s will, is the only place from which we can practice the spiritual virtues and reap the grace that comes with them. How free is the addict? Certainly the decisions which brought them to that point may have started out in freedom, but we know that sin is not freedom, it is slavery. How free is someone to fight certain situations? That is the lesson and grace of forgiveness. The only thing that can we judge are the actions the person takes, not the effects of those actions or the person who has acted. Someone may have made bad decisions and the result of such is poverty or homelessness. Is it our role to chastise and admonish or to reconcile and heal?Poverty which is sin creates distrust, envy, sloth, death. There is no virtue or benefit which arises from it. The poor are only blessed if their poverty is self-imposed, a discipline rather than a burden. [] There is the myth of the ‘happy native,’ the ones who ‘don’t know any better’ and are therefore happy. They may not know better, nor need to, but if we take advantage of their ignorance and reap their resources for our own use because they do not know to miss them, then the betrayal is even deeper if they do find out. This prejudicial thinking has been used to keep people in oppression and squalor, strip them of dignity and consign them to the edges of society – to keep them poor.Hunger and homelessness are visible symptoms of poverty. Can there be hunger and/or homelessness without poverty? Certainly – we think of natural disasters that displace persons or limit access to necessities. But we can also think of them in direct relation to poverty. Natural disasters which happen in places of such great poverty that no help is available nor will it be forthcoming. Persons displaced who had nowhere to start with and now even less places to go. Refugees streaming into countries because of war, famine, natural disasters, trapped in camps with little or no infrastructure; overwhelming what assistance has been available. Without distribution or actions which support the Common Good, some are left in such dire poverty that they have no dignity and any they may have is easily stripped away. Without the love of God entering their lives through others they may be driven away, embittered, cynical creating a cycle of poverty which is difficult to break.Poverty, hunger, and homelessness are bigger than we perceive. It is our short-sightedness or ignorance or prejudices which keep us from seeing it as sin. It is our own selfishness, our own actions which can make us blind to the truly poor, and fail to embrace a life of poverty. We must be not the rich young man (*Mk* 10:17-31; *Mt* 19:16-30) sad because we cannot reconcile the Law and the Beatitudes, but truly seek only what we need and give the rest to the poor. Only then can we take up our cross and follow Jesus.Poverty was not new to Jesus. He confronts the problem directly in his own temptations in the desert after his baptism. The devil challenges him “*If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become loaves of bread. He said in reply, ‘It is written: ‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God.’*” (*Mt* 4:3-4) Certainly Jesus could have continuously fed the world through his power, but he understood that that power was to be saved, to give us ‘living bread,’ ‘the bread come down from heaven’ which feeds us forever, not merely satisfies our physical hunger. Privation and poverty are not in and of themselves evil, especially if taken on for spiritual growth. True bread feeds the soul. Live first in the Eucharist, he tells us, then all your needs will be provided for.Certainly the poor will be with us always, but they should not be the poor of needs. All the money in the world, like all of the stones which could be transformed into bread, cannot feed the needy poor. From the beginning of his ministry, Jesus understood that there are no quick fixes. Dignity is the main course, not merely full bellies. When Jesus meets physical needs he always couches it within dignity. Jesus gives dignity to the woman at his feet, pouring out costly oil and tears upon his feet and drying them with her hair. Jesus gives dignity to the bridegroom in Cana who has but water. Jesus gives dignity to gift of 5 loaves and two fishes and to the 5000.Can we be any better than Jesus? Once again it drives home the point that we must do both service and advocacy. Living the Eucharist, embracing poverty, these give us the understanding of how to help. Compassion, not mere philanthropy guides our giving. The poor are not merely vehicles for our self-righteousness, or smugness. The spiritual virtue gives grace to those that receive *and* those that give. We get as good as we give but only because we are truly brothers and sisters doing God’s will: *loving one another as he has loved us*. |
| Materials Needed | * PowerPoint
* Computer
* Overhead projector
* Internet connection for Activity Video
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| **Attention Grabber** | **(10 min)** |
| ***What would you do?***There was a T.V. show called “What would you do?” with John Quinones from ABC news. They use a hidden camera and actors to set up a scenario to record people’s reactions to show them how prejudice against certain people or situations affect all of us negatively. This time they used a woman actor to portray a single mother trying to pay for her groceries with food stamps. She came up short and didn’t have enough to pay for baby food so she started crying. Most of the people standing in line behind her responded favorably towards her with compassion and understanding and some even offered to make up the difference in cost, but there were a few people who stayed quiet and didn’t want to get involved, and even fewer faces of disdain and rejection. One of the men standing in line that would not look up or meet her eyes, and was very quiet talked to the host of the show after the scenario was played out and said he felt bad for her and wanted to help, but he had lost his job and didn’t know if he had enough to pay for his own few groceries.Video link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j1r2GF7ovL0> The PointThis whole scenario was prompted by a true incident that happened in Georgia to a young mother who is herself on dialysis treatment for kidney disease. Because it takes 12 hours for her dialysis treatment, she cannot work until after she has a transplant. She is currently on the transplant list and is anxiously and hopefully waiting for a donor. Meanwhile, they are struggling with what little bit her husband makes with his failing business and they are coming up woefully short with all the added expenses they have to pay for medical bills. When she came up about ten dollars short at the grocery store the manager was called to take care of the situation. He told the cashier to just give it to her. Then he turned to the young mother and said “Sorry, I work for a living.”Discussion*The woman in the actual scenario felt embarrassed and degraded. The manager of the store just assumed she was lazy without knowing anything about her. Our prejudices can be a terrible thing.*How do you think the woman felt?1. What effect did the heckler have?
2. Should society use resources on people who cannot work?

How do we treat people who are poor?Is this what we do? Make assumptions about the poor without knowing anything about them? What are we called to do? We are called to provide needs for the poor. This includes not only physical needs (food, clothes, shelter, medical care), but also emotional and spiritual needs (dignity and respect).  |
| **Outline** | **Prayer**:  | *Mk 12:41-44.* |
| **Presentation**:  | *PowerPoint.* |
| **Activity**:  | *None.* |
| **Table Discussion**:  | *Questions*. |
| **Post Discussion:** | *None* |
| **Closing Prayer**:  | *Group Prayer/Petitions.* |
| **Prayer** | **Introductory Prayer:** (**2 min,** after candle is lit…**)*****Mk 12:41-44****Jesus sat down opposite the treasury and observed how the crowd put money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow also came and put in two small coins worth a few cents. Calling his disciples to himself, he said to them, "Amen, I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the other contributors to the treasury. For they have all contributed from their surplus wealth, but she, from her poverty, has contributed all she had, her whole livelihood**.* |
| **Pre-discussion Presentation** | (15 min) |
|  | **The Son of Man Has Nowhere to Lay His Head**Jesus tells us: “*Blessed are you who are poor*.” (*Lk* 6:20). What does he mean? *What is poverty?* The dictionary says that poverty is the lack of means in providing material needs. In other words, not having what you need to survive, whether it is food, clothes, shelter, or medical care. *What are the causes of poverty?* There are numerous causes of poverty: lack of individual responsibility, bad government policy, exploitation by people and businesses with power and influence, illness, loss of job, lack of fair pay, and lack of education, and that is just to name a few. These things are also result of poverty. The poorest people also have little representation or voice in public and political debates, making it even harder to escape from poverty. This cycle of poverty is all around us. About 21,000 children die every day around the world from poverty. *That’s about one child dying every four seconds*. [SHOW PICTURES?] “*A beggar’s request do not reject; do not turn your face away from the poor. From the needy do not turn your eyes; do not give them reason to curse you*.” (*Sir* 4:4-5)How many times have you encountered a poor or homeless person on the streets? What is your first response? Do you look away? Refuse to make eye contact? Pretend they are not there? Cross the street to avoid them? WHY? Do they make you feel uncomfortable? Are you embarrassed for them? Do you think it might be contagious? Sadly, most of us respond this way, we don’t want to think of unpleasant things or what it would be like if we were the one that was unfortunate to be poor or living on the streets. Is this how Jesus would respond? Jesus was poor too. He did not have a lot of things or possessions, but he gave the greatest gift of all: “Himself.” He walked among the poor and took care of the sick. He devoted his life to taking care of others.What should we do? (hint: the same thing)In Matthew Jesus tells us: “*Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me*.” (*Matt* 25:40)[There was a T.V. show called “What would you do?” with John Quinones from ABC news. They use a hidden camera and actors to set up a scenario to record people’s reactions to show them how prejudice against certain people or situations affect all of us negatively. This time they used a woman actor to portray a single mother trying to pay for her groceries with food stamps. She came up short and didn’t have enough to pay for baby food so she started crying. Most of the people standing in line behind her responded favorably towards her with compassion and understanding and some even offered to make up the difference in cost, but there were a few people who stayed quiet and didn’t want to get involved, and even fewer faces of disdain and rejection. One of the men standing in line that would not look up or meet her eyes, and was very quiet talked to the host of the show after the scenario was played out and said he felt bad for her and wanted to help, but he had lost his job and didn’t know if he had enough to pay for his own few groceries. This whole scenario was prompted by a true incident that happened in Georgia to a young mother who is herself on dialysis treatment for kidney disease. Because it takes 12 hours for her dialysis treatment, she cannot work until after she has a transplant. She is currently on the transplant list and is anxiously and hopefully waiting for a donor. Meanwhile, they are struggling with what little bit her husband makes with his failing business and they are coming up woefully short with all the added expenses they have to pay for medical bills. When she came up about ten dollars short at the grocery store the manager was called to take care of the situation. He told the cashier to just give it to her. Then he turned to the young mother and said “Sorry, I work for a living.” She felt embarrassed and degraded. How do we treat people who are poor? The manager of the store just assumed she was lazy without knowing anything about her. Is this what we do? Make assumptions about the poor without knowing anything about them? Prejudice can be a terrible thing.What are we called to do? We are called to provide needs for the poor. This includes not only physical needs (food, clothes, shelter, medical care), but also emotional and spiritual needs (dignity and respect). ] “*When he looked up he saw some wealthy people putting their offerings into the treasury* *and he noticed a poor widow putting in two small coins.* *He said, “I tell you truly, this poor widow put in more than all the rest;* *for those others have all made offerings from their surplus wealth, but she, from her poverty, has offered her whole livelihood.*" (*Lk* 21:1-4)I think it was Mother Teresa who said everything you need to know about God you can learn from the poor. Why? You see we rely on our houses, cars, clothes, phones, computers, I-pads, Facebook, GPS, education, jobs, money; good stuff! The truly poor have none of that so they rely on God. In Matthew Jesus tells us “*Look at the birds in the sky; they do not sow or reap, they gather nothing into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are not you more important than they?*” (*Matt* 6:26) What is more important, riches of this world or God? We all know the answer academically but do we live it?Ever hear “I have nothing to wear?” For most of us that means one of three things:I have nothing newI have nothing cleanI have nothing fashionableTo a poor person, I have nothing to wear means I have to be naked when I wash my clothes. What is the difference between needs and wants?“*When he looked up he saw some wealthy people putting their offerings into the treasury and he noticed a poor widow putting in two small coins. He said, “I tell you truly, this poor widow put in more than all the rest; for those others have all made offerings from their surplus wealth, but she, from her poverty, has offered her whole livelihood.*" (*Lk* 21:1-4)Needs are the very basic things we need to survive. No extras. Wants are the extras that we desire or wish for. In our world, we take all our needs for granted. We focus on our wants. There is a danger in acquiring more possessions than you need. It motivates you to want more. The satisfaction is fleeting. Soon you want more or something else. As Matthew Kelley puts it “You can never get enough of what you do not need.” In fact many of the wealthiest people in the world are quite unhappy. Why? Because once your basic and physical needs are met (food, clothes, shelter), money and possessions cannot satisfy you. Money and possessions may satisfy your mental and emotional needs for a short time (it is always exciting and uplifting to get something new) but that feeling does not for last for long (and it is only a feeling) and it does nothing for you spiritual needs. We will never be fulfilled until our Spiritual needs are satisfied.The poverty that we need to address as Catholics is of needs not of wants. Many want to define poverty by wants. Certainly it can be argued that most of the poor in this country are rich compared to 90% of the world’s population. No matter how you slice it, the differences between those who have and to those who have not is large.“In all of his life Jesus presents himself as *our model.* He is ‘the perfect man, (Cf. *Jn* 13:15; *Lk* 11:1; *Mt* 5:11-12) who invites us to become his disciples and follow him. In humbling himself, he has given us an example to imitate, through his prayer he draws us to pray, and by his poverty he calls us to accept freely the privation and persecutions that may come our way.” (*CCC* 520)Who are people known for helping the poor? Mother Teresa, St. Stephen, St. Vincent, St. Anthony, St. Francis of Assisi, Works of Mercy *Corporal* (for the body)Feed the hungryGive drink to the thirstyClothe the nakedShelter the homelessVisit the sick*Spiritual* (for the Spirit)Warn the sinnerTeach the ignorantCounsel the doubtfulComfort the sorrowfulBear wrongs patientlyForgive injuriesPray for the living and the deadVisit the imprisonedBury the dead |
| **Activity / Table Talk** | Table Discussion (35 min) |
|  | QUESTIONS:1. What are the reasons for poverty?
2. What are the reasons for hunger?
3. What are the reasons for homelessness?
4. What do *we* learn from the poor? What do we gain from helping the poor?
5. Who is supposed to take care of the poor?
6. What are the causes of poverty/homelessness?
7. What are the stereotypes (discriminations) for poor/homeless people?
8. Have you ever done anything for a poor person? What were the circumstances? How did it make you feel? Did you gain from the experience?
9. We talk about the poor in economic terms. How can people have money but still be poor?
10. What is the difference between needs and wants?
11. Is it sinful to not help the poor?
12. How much should we help the poor?
13. How much in this world is ours? We are caretakers not owners of the world.
14. How can we each live the spiritual virtue of poverty?
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| Post-Discussion Activity | **(0 min).**  |
|  | None. |
| Closing | **Announcements and Prayer (5 min).**  |
|  | **Group Prayer**Intercessions  |
| Reminder | **\*\*\*\* REMEMBER IMPORTANCE OF RECORDING ATTENDANCE!!** This is a legal document! Please, write down on your attendance sheet the name of any teen at your table, whether they are on your roll or not. |
| Attachments | **Below:*** *None*
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