

**6th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
YEAR C**

Christ faced people with a radical choice: to live by the values of the world (pursuit of money, pleasure, popularity, power, prestige), or to live by the values of the Kingdom (poverty of spirit, cleanness of heart, capacity to show mercy, ability to suffer in the cause of right....)

In his novel, *The First Circle*, Solzhenitsyn tells the story of a Russian diplomat named Innokenty. It was during Stalin's regime. Innokenty and his wife Dottie lived a pampered life. In each post he was sent to, a lavishly furnished house awaited them. And they lapped it all up. They had everything they wanted, at a time when the world was torn apart by World War II. But not a breath of the sorrow of the world touched them.

However, in the sixth year of their marriage, Innokenty began to experience a sense of revulsion towards all material things. The feeling puzzled and alarmed him. He had everything, yet he lacked something. Even his lovely wife Dottie was becoming a stranger to him. Their smart way of life he found embarrassing, where everybody was the same, and where they would all jump up to drink a toast to Comrade Stalin, whom they feared and secretly despised.

One day he started to go through some letters and books his deceased mother had left him. As he read the letters, he discovered a set of values that were in complete contrast with those of the circle to which he belonged.

The values of his mother began to make sense. In her letters she spoke about such things as compassion, truth, goodness, and so on. Then he came across this extraordinary piece: "The most precious thing in the whole world is the consciousness of not participating in injustice."

Suddenly he discovered what was missing from his life. And for days and nights he continued to sit there breathing in the values of his mother's world like a man breathes in fresh air. He was discovering a new way of seeing and judging life. Up to this his philosophy of life had been that we only live once. To put oneself out for another person was sheer folly. Now he was grasping another truth, that we have only one conscience, and that a crippled conscience is as irretrievable as a lost life.

Innokenty heard of an elderly doctor who had treated his mother during her last illness. In a day's time he was going to Paris where he intended to pass on some medical secrets to the West because he believed the world had a right to know them. But a trap had been set for him. Innokenty knew about the trap. He made a phone call to the doctor. But the call was traced and Innokenty was arrested.

Innokenty knew what it was like to be rich. When you are rich you have a name, you are a member of a respected group, and are never really oppressed. A phone call and everything is fixed up. But now that he had lost his job, his prestige, his wealth, and even his wife, he was discovering what it meant to be poor. To be poor is to have no friends, and no security.

Yet Innokenty had gained a treasure, and he knew it. He had experienced a spiritual awakening.

So many tend to rely on their riches. For them it's this world that matters. God is more or less redundant, and the other world remote and hazy. The poor turn to God instinctively.

It's not that poverty in itself is a good thing. When Jesus says, "Blessed are the poor and the hungry", he isn't giving a blessing to abject poverty and starvation – these are evil things.

The poverty that is blessed is the poverty of those who put their trust in God rather than in material things, and who embrace the values of the kingdom. Only God can fill our emptiness; only God can satisfy the hunger of the human heart.