

Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Last week the House of Representatives voted to strip \$40 billion from America's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. You could almost hear hungry people crying in despair. This bill will probably not progress through the Senate or survive the president's veto. Still, for legislators to show such disregard for the poor in our country is disheartening. Churches, food pantries and soup kitchens cannot provide sufficient assistance to support the needy. Everyone has a right to food, and the government should protect that right.

Sadly, the people who need help each week to pay their bills are accustomed to this. They apply for jobs, but are not hired. They take out loans, but lenders cheat them. They need medical care, but they cannot afford it. Those with less grow angry toward those who could do something and don't.

Where can they turn? Psalm 146 says they should turn to the Lord. Today's gospel tells how God took care of poor Lazarus when the rich man abandoned him. The Prophet Amos lambastes the rich who lie on beds of ivory, eat plenty of food, play music, drink wine from bowls, and anoint themselves with the best oil while God's faithful people are collapsing from anguish. In the midst of these readings we sing, "Praise the Lord, my soul." Why should we be happy? The Lord gives concrete help to the needy: He sets captives free, gives sight to the blind, raises up those who were bowed down, loves the just and protects strangers. The Lord does all the things that the rich do not.

The Lord helps us in two different ways: materially and spiritually. Sometimes God does just what the psalm says. After our prayer, we sometimes do receive better health, faithful friends, and more food. Other times we do not receive the explicit help we want. But we always receive from the Lord the spiritual security of friendship and care. Even in our poverty, we find more strength from God than from human beings. When people falter, God remains faithful.

Each of us has complaints about life. Sometimes we don't have what others enjoy. Sometimes other people treat us unjustly. We don't like it. Psalm 146 reminds us that God doesn't like it either. Injustice is intolerable. God will offer justice when people do not. Nonetheless, we should make sure that we are offering justice to those who need it most. We can offer food to those who need it, we can help the sick, and we can share our faith. We can watch out for children who are missing one of their parents. When we help build a more just country, God will look more kindly upon us in our times of need.