

(All transcripts are edited for readability and clarity.)

Malcolm: This is your host, Malcolm Schluenderfritz, and joining me today is my co-host, Peter Land, from Philadelphia. Our guest today is Jason Wilde from Englewood, CO, just a few blocks away from where I live here in the suburbs of Denver. How are you doing, Peter?

Peter: I'm doing great, Malcolm and Jason! Thank you! It's great to be connected to you across the country. Yeah, I'm excited to talk with you guys today.

Malcolm: How are you doing, Jason?

Jason: Great! It's great to be connected to you guys again. In this time of isolation, it's good to be able to put faces to voices and put voices to action here. So thank you for inviting me.

Malcolm: [1:00](#) You know, Jason, I'm really glad to have you on today since our topic is voluntary poverty. I know your family has had a lot of experience with that. Would you mind just telling us a little bit about your personal experience with voluntary Gospel poverty?

Jason: [1:20](#) Yeah, sure. Our journey goes over many years of learning and discerning with the Lord and being taught by the Lord. Right now we are Catholic lay missionaries with Family Missions Company; and one of the charisms of family missions company is Gospel poverty. And so we've certainly tried to live deeper and deeper . . . but really our story starts way back. I was an electrical engineer with a major technology company in Texas, and for whatever reason the Lord started moving me in this direction, asking me to give up things, to start to think about what I spend my money on, start to think about what I valued, as a family, and as a father . . . and it just kind of snowballed, right? So it started off with cutting the cable, first; that was just a tiny little thing that had popped into my mind, so we did it. And then I gave up my car; all of a sudden we started to notice our family growing closer together; my wife had to drive me to work every day, I had to be with my kids more and more in the car every day. So we started learning that as you gave up some of these things the fruit abounded out of that, it was unexpected and it was beautiful . . . our family came closer together, and we started moving closer to work so I had less of a commute, and stuff like that. It really helps us to keep our eye on God, and He's continued to teach us that he will give us what we need, when we need it, and to really just use the gifts he has given us. So praise the Lord for that.

Malcolm: [3:09](#) Yes, as far as experience with poverty, our family was never, you know, *that* well off. And one thing I noticed was that we were actually . . . one sense we got more fun out of life because small things made a bigger impact. You know, there's this sort of idea around that having really high tastes, enjoying, I don't know, fine dining, or the very best opera experience, or whatever it might be, is almost a *virtue*. But I think it is actually the other way around. I think that being easily pleased is a virtue. And it

certainly means that you'll get a lot more enjoyment out of life. And so, just small things that other people wouldn't have thought anything about, getting a new book say, as a Christmas present, was fun because of the fact that we didn't spend a lot on the kinds of things that other people would spend on. So in my experience that was one of the aspects of poverty (of a certain type, we were never *really* poor, but still being perhaps less well to do than others) was that life was more exciting. Peter, what personal experience do you have with intentional poverty?

Peter: 4:47 Well, I grew up in a fairly middle class background, in a pretty comfortable setting. We never worried about the things that we needed. We weren't incredibly wealthy, but I couldn't say that I experienced anything like poverty as a child and teenager and moving forward. Maybe I had a similar experience to Jason's; in that . . . (And thank you Jason for sharing your experience as a family, that's really touching and beautiful. I really rejoice in the movement that you've embraced towards intentional simplicity, to be missionaries at the service of others and God.) So for me, I begin to experience something of an existential crisis towards the end of high school and into college. During those years I was really wondering what I was living for and who I was as a person, and what makes people happy. I went to a wealthy school and I began to reflect on the fact that many people didn't appear to be that happy. And I realized that I wasn't really happy, and that having a life of fun, and partying, and craziness really left me quite empty. So I began to get involved in other activities over my time in college. One of the things that really impacted me was service work. I went to a Jesuit Catholic institution for both high school and college, so service work was part of the education, but when I began to take my own initiative and embrace service work, I began to encounter people in settings far different from my own that made me really question my life a whole lot more. People who, with very little material goods, embodied a sense of joy and peace that I and many of my friends didn't have, really that *very few* people that I knew in Western American culture, had. And so it made me reflect on all the things that we have and are striving for, are seeking in our lives, in contrast to . . . I was on a Native American reservation in New Mexico, Navajo Nation, and I also went to Jamaica for a service trip, and in both settings I found people that, with very little, seemed to be very content, and content on a level that I didn't experience in America. And as my journey continued in college, and I began to desire to know God more and more, I realized that God was inviting me, prompting me to continue to let go of excess. Like Jason mentioned, I began to find that less is more, in a very personal, a deeply personal way. I felt very free and liberated in having very little, and just learning to be myself. Just enjoying to be myself, and not trying to put on any pretense, any show, which is what I had learned growing up, and which left me incredibly empty. So poverty for me was an external, but ultimately an internal movement. To become just me, in a way! [Being] as I am in my poverty, learning who I am in my poverty, and accepting it and discovering God in the midst of my own poverty.

Jason: 9:09 I find it fascinating that you resonate with a similar story, starting your journey with service and with working through that. That's a very common theme that I see working in the mission field. We do a lot of mission trips, and a lot of people's first encounter with poverty is in these kind of service activities or service opportunities. Our

family was very similar, in fact. We took a mission trip to the Philippines three and a half years ago, and you know, to be walking around these slums where literally if you would hand out a twenty dollar bill to someone, the equivalent of a twenty dollar bill, that would be the first time they had seen that in their life time, an amount that big, and . . . the fact that these children, to have milk for them was a birthday treat, you know, it was just such extreme differences from what we see here in our local communities in our country and in our . . . in what we think of as our world [that] your world is literally torn apart and shattered and you have to put it back together. After we finished that trip, it was a very similar experience. We flew from Cagayan de Oro to Cebu, which is a popular beach tourist destination to spend some days before our flight out. And I mean we weren't staying in a five star hotel by any means, it was as cheap as we could find for our family, but we felt guilty having breakfast in this hotel where they were just serving food aplenty, as much as you could want! It was just an eye opening experience for our family, we just made a resolute decision to stop wasting things, stop treating our life as if it's just all given . . . and then the beautiful thing is that we started noticing the poor. We started walking along the streets of these resort cities and you'd turn around and all of a sudden there's an alley where there's a lot of little huts set up, and you don't see those until you have your eyes opened; it is a beautiful thing when that happens. And so absolutely, service opportunities are a great way for people to encounter the poor, and Pope Francis talks about that a lot, the culture of encounter. And that's such a great way and a strong way for the Lord to work in our lives and help us to learn about the poor.

Malcolm: [11:51](#) Jason and Peter, thanks for pointing out that one of the values of intentional poverty is exactly that, solidarity with the poor. The poor who maybe did not choose to live this way. And the reason it is important, I think, for us to live in solidarity with the poor is because of imitation of Christ. As God, in one sense you could say he was "rich"; St. Paul uses this language, that He was full, and He emptied himself, and came in solidarity with human beings. And that's more extraordinary really, than any amount of solidarity we could have with people from a lower income bracket. There's an infinite abyss between God and human beings, and yet . . . He could have just forgiven us, He could have redeemed us without "showing up". But instead He choose the path of solidarity and walking *with* us, even to the point of dying with us. And in one sense . . . of course, *His* death as God was redemptive, and all that. Some people might say, "Well, you know, being in solidarity with people doesn't actually help them out." (If you're just another human being in solidarity with someone else.) And yet I think it's a universal instinct in human beings to, in some sense, put yourself in solidarity with others, even if that solidarity will not directly and immediately affect their condition. I think that really came to me when I was standing outside of an abortion clinic, protesting. The protest was sort of useless because the compound was surrounded by really high walls, (because some other groups of protestors had been pretty obnoxious, so they had put these walls up) it even surrounded their parking lot, so you couldn't really witness to the people there, and they were on this sort of back industrial street where there was no traffic, so we weren't witnessing to anyone else. Of course we were praying, but we could have prayed pretty well at home, so we were just standing there awkwardly outside of this wall on this barren industrial street with signs. And it felt really silly and like we weren't doing anything. But there was the point: that we believed that

something really terrible was happening, and we were sacrificing our own comfort, our own plans, to spend a few hours standing outside this wall. And that was more powerful than any amount of prayers that we might have said at home; we were in some way putting ourselves on the line for these other human beings.

Peter: 14:53 Malcolm, what you're touching upon made me think of the doctrine of the Church of the mystical body of Christ. How we can be in solidarity with others, and that can have an impact on people across time and space through God, through Christ, because as God, He of course transcends time and space. So he can take our sacrifice, he can take our prayers and desires, our works, and labors, and apply them for the benefit of others in need, completely unbeknownst to ourselves. And that to me is very encouraging and heartening. That we can be in communion, we really *are* in communion as a body of people in Christ, as a humanity as a whole in Christ, and so that none of our actions, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant, can be without an impact on that greater whole. I think that's a great, a special grace that Jesus gives us to participate in His redemptive work of suffering on behalf of humanity. There's a number of saints who have commented on the infinite value of a life lived with love. And actions done with love. We can't really measure the effect that those can have; we will see the effects, the fruits in heaven, but even then . . . the effects and the fruits will continue to unfold, I believe, until the end of time. I mean, I think you can look at the life of St. Francis, and how many actions in his early life were . . . seemed to be completely isolated, but they set in motion a movement in his heart that began to . . . that ultimately enveloped the whole world. And you can see his life now, still attracting thousands and thousands of people from all over the world each day to Assisi, and it's like . . . the life that he embraced, the sacrifices that he made, the prayers he offered, everything that he embraced, is continuing to bear fruit in Christ and will do so until the end of time. So I think it should give us a lot of encouragement to not take lightly our time, to really value how we are living, and to ultimately try to do everything in union with the life and love of Christ.

Jason: 18:00 I think there's also a beautiful idea of bringing those two ideas together; the living in solidarity and your actions having effects going on. It also helps us to live in solidarity with Jesus Christ Himself, you know going back in the past, our actions can also help us have a conversion such that we are connected more fully with Christ and the body of Christ, and that's honestly . . . that's the beautiful thing [about] a lot of these actions, simple actions, that we've learned from the saints through all of history, is that a lot of them are personal conversions. And it helps us to know that Jesus Christ came as a poor man, He was from a poor family, they were for all practical purposes *refugees*! And these are the kind of things that get lost from a lot of the traditions and a lot of the art and a lot of the celebrations that we have about Jesus; but he *was a poor man*, He was someone who literally lived off of what was given to Him. He was someone who had to work with the poor suffering people that He had to work with, and that's the people He *choose* to work with. And so as part of my personal conversion, a lot of it is also been this rejection of a . . . I like to call it a "machismo" Jesus. The idea that Jesus wasn't fully man. It's such a scary heresy that's happening in some cases; you know, "When he was up on that cross, He wasn't feeling anything, He was *strong*, He was

bearing it all” . . . No! He was *suffering*! He was a suffering man just as if I was on that cross, He would be feeling that exact same pain, and yet he choose to bear it, he choose to bear that suffering, and that had eternal consequences for all of us. And so that's the beautiful thing; it's this paradox that this poor man in Jesus Christ, poor man-God, became *king*. He literally [became] the personification of the last will be first and the first will be last. So you know, for me that's just a huge part of my personal conversation, that living with solidarity with the poor *through* Jesus Christ.

Malcolm: 20:29 Jason, I've had the same experience. It seems there have always been these two heretical tendencies, that the Church has had to fight against. The one tendency which makes Christ out to be *just* a man, and then the other one that makes Him out to not really be a man at all, *only* God. And they actually both started out really early on. The Gnostics were opponents of the first Christians, and the Gnostics thought that since matter was evil, Christ didn't really become a man, it just *looked* that way to us. Just looked like a man, sort of took on an image. And shortly afterwards the Arians showed up and said, “Well, actually, he's just a creature. He's not really God.” Because it's a difficult thing: the human mind does not like this idea that this *one* individual was both fully God and fully Man. The temptation is to simplify it, to say “Well, this was a man that had a great *relationship* with God.” Or “This was God who sort of took on an *appearance* so he could interact with us.” Those are both much easier things to understand. And it's very hard to imagine how this would have played out, this one individual being fully God and fully man. But yes I've seen that tendency just to . . . usually it isn't explicitly voiced, but just to sort of downplay the *humanness* of Christ, and even the humanness of our Blessed Lady as well, to forget that they were embedded in a certain culture, in a certain time, in a specific place, they really were feeling and experiencing all the things we feel and experience. And when we start to realize that Christ enters . . . if we forget that Christ really was a Man, we loose the actually unique thing about our religion. Because there are many religions that have a certain amount of insight, in that there's a divine being beyond the world that we pray to, but we're the only religion that claims that God became a man, and died, and lived with us. *That* is the unique aspect of Christianity, the thing that really sets us apart, the important piece, and yet that's exactly the piece that can get buried.

One topic I would like to bring up is that poverty tends to scare a lot of people. As soon as you say that word, people start to get nervous! Especially since we are talking about the destitute people around the world living in shacks, being in solidarity with them; “Do they mean that we're all supposed to live in shacks?!” And then another temptation is for people to think, “Well, since it can't mean living in shacks, it just means, you know, being *detached* from things. We can enjoy all of them, but so long as I say I'm detached everything will be all right.” So what is it that we actually mean when we talk about poverty?

Jason:23:50 So I would like to jump in here. [There are] a lot of things that I think of when I say “poverty”. You know, there is a sliding scale of *all* virtues and vices. And if you go too far from one vice you end up hitting another vice, right? So poverty, voluntary poverty, is obviously that you're rejecting the sin of greed that so many of us are attracted to, but if you go *too* far you end up in destitution, right? Or I like to think of

the definition of pride in Judaism, in ancient Judaism, was literally turning down the gifts of God. So for them, to be humble meant to use the gifts that were given to you and not to ask for more. Which is an imperfect humility by what we would believe as Christians, but it's a beautiful starting point for this conversation on what poverty is. It's . . . God blesses all of us, He wants to bless us, He is a good God, He wants to come to us, and provide for our needs, that is absolutely Biblical. And that's where a lot of people get stuck, I think, with the idea of poverty, because, you know, you're rejecting the goodness that God has given you. And in my mind, it is not that you're *rejecting* it, it's that you're using what God has given you for a *greater purpose*. A lot of times we found so much happiness living simple lives, that when we are given something, we kind of push it away, we don't want to be given gifts. And we've struggled with this a lot, as our family. Christmas is coming up here, our kids are going to start receiving gifts, and we're like, "Oh, they don't need that. You know, I don't want that in my house. I don't want to deal with that!" But a lot of times those gifts end up being used for a greater purpose. God has an idea, when He gives us something it is for a purpose. And just to . . . like in our life, when we started living lives of Gospel poverty, we found that instead of just going out and buying something and immediately gratifying our need for something, we prayed about it. And that's what the poor would do. That's what the Anawim, the blessed that Jesus talks about in the Beatitudes, that's what they would do. They would not have something, they'd be sitting around in a house with nothing but a candle on a table and no food, and they would pray. And the Lord does amazing, beautiful miracles through providing in that time of need. And so a lot of times where I start with my discussion on Gospel poverty, is that we have to pray for what we need and not just immediately gratify that need through our own means, through whatever that is, money or work or . . . those are all those addictions that lead to our own vice, again pushing so far down one path that you're forgetting the other side. And so there's the word "simplicity" [which] is a great way to put it, a *simple* life. There was another example that I read recently "The Abundant Life." You know, it is not "The Good Life." I don't like the term "The Good Life." It is the *Abundant* life. It is what God provides you out of *His* abundance, out of love for us. And so I think in each person it looks different, too. That's the other thing. I found one family will live Gospel poverty with zero toys, zero possessions, and they are completely joyful and happy with that. Another family, they have some things, but they are still living that charism of Gospel poverty. So there's also not an *absolute* answer to this question, necessarily.

Peter: [28:10](#) I agree; thanks Jason for sharing. I think it's important to make the distinction between poverty as it is understood in a secular, worldly sense and poverty from a Christian perspective—which is, Jason, what you've been eloquently describing! But from a worldly sense, I think poverty is [seen as] lacking the basic necessities, or just barely having enough to survive. And in that sense, poverty in America is a lot different than poverty throughout the world. Or at least in what we call developing countries. So in that sense poverty, especially in America, can be very relative, depending on the circumstances that people live in. But I noticed that in America, the poverty that I experienced here was vastly different than the poverty abroad. And what I mean by that, is that here the poor I think are plagued by being excluded and like . . . I don't know, making . . . they probably feel on some level more *insignificant* in the face of

a society, an exclusionary society, in which they're maybe being given some of the basic necessities that they need, but they are not really included in the society around them. And so poverty can take on that spiritual level. Whereas, like I mentioned before, when I traveled abroad and did service in developing countries I encountered an interior richness—at times, not across the board—but at times I encountered something of an abundance in a very simple life. So I think when we're talking about poverty we need to keep that in mind is that it's complicated, it has multiple definitions. I think one of the most important ones, at least for us as Christians, is to look at it in light of scripture, in light of the Church, in light of the life of Christ and his teaching. And so when I think about it in those terms, I think of poverty primarily as an interior attitude and disposition; one in which we ultimately feel ourselves as poor before God. Weak and dependent as creatures in need of His mercy, His love, His providential kindness . . . and knowing that all things come from Him. All the things that we need for life ultimately, whether they come through secondary means or supernaturally, they come from God. And I think that's one of the dangers in the modern world, is that it appears that we have a control of all of our basic needs and that we've provided them for ourselves. (Even though probably, in light of exploiting peoples around the world, which we don't often take into account, as Americans . . . that much of our wealth is built on the sweat blood and tears of people across the world.) But despite that, there's very few people that really recognize that the wealth here ultimately comes from God. And so I think poverty invites us to not store up what is superfluous, not store up an excess of things; I mean we can think about multiple Gospel passages, like that one [about the] man who stored, he had multiple years of grain, and he told himself to eat, drink, and be merry because he had all this stored up for himself. And God appeared to him and said, "You Fool; this night your life will be accounted of you." And Jesus ends that parable by saying "This is how it will be for all those who are poor in the things that matter to God." And so it seems to me that Jesus is inviting a poverty that allows, that focuses on, the things that are eternal, the things that matter to God, the virtues, the looking out for our brothers and sisters, in service to our brothers and sisters. So I think there's this dynamic of having an interior attitude of poverty before God, and even before others, like St. Francis desiring to be the humblest man at the service of all people, and subject to all people, and then *in that poverty* becoming rich in the things of God, that make material things less and less significant. And I think that's a very important point for me: that the more I've discovered God in my life, the more I've opened my heart up to God, and to others, to genuine relationships, material things become more of a burden, something like you were saying, Jason; I don't want a lot of things, they tend to clutter my life and they become overwhelming, and there's greater joy in the simpler things of life. That's what I've discovered, and the greatest joy is in just being with God, in my utter poverty.

Malcolm: [34:14](#) Peter, thanks for bringing up that point about the difference between American poor and poor in other parts of the world, because I think it really does highlight something important. I think it partly highlights the fact that in the United States, most of us are rich, even people who think they're poor, are rich by world and historical standards. So say someone here might feel bad because they're driving a really old, beat up car. But in the third world, anyone who can drive a car is *obviously*, rich, I mean there's just no doubt about it. And if you look at it from a world-historic

standard, think about the time of Christ: even the rich people, the best they could do was riding in a chariot or being carried in a litter in a hot, dusty climate. So when they traveled, they could not get into an air conditioned space and go down the road at 60 miles an hour. I imagine that Tiberius Caesar would have probably traded a lot of his wealth for the ability to get into an air-conditioned space and drive down the road at 60 miles an hour. Let alone getting into an airplane and shooting across the country in a few hours! That was something absolutely beyond the richest men in Christ's time, even beyond their wildest dreams. And I think it is interesting that with Tiberius Caesar, (so probably the richest man of all at Christ's time,) one of the things that was considered remarkable about him, is that he was able to eat one cucumber every day of the year. And that was because he was so rich, he had a special fondness for cucumbers, and so he got his slaves to build what we would now call glass houses or frames in one of his palaces, and they heated them up in the winter time, and he managed to get a cucumber a day, and that was considered remarkable enough that it ended up [being mentioned] when people wrote about his life. And another remarkable thing about him was that he managed to build, in a shallow bay, a palace out into the water so that the lower walls were partially submerged, so that it would stay cooler during the hottest part of the summer, in that Mediterranean climate. So the richest man in Christ's time means somebody with air conditioning and the ability to eat cucumbers out of season. And then you think about the United States where we're eating fruits from the tropics from any time of year, certainly not having to eat with the seasons, we're driving around in cars, we're able to talk to one another across thousands of miles instantaneously, we're living in a *fairy land world*! And yet we can't be grateful because of the fact that in our culture someone who has, you know, a beat-up car, and an apartment with air conditioning, and the ability to eat bananas whenever they want, feels that they are not worth much because the other people have so much more. So our culture is strange; it's kind of doubly corrosive, in that we're all living pretty well, materially speaking (not *all* of us; I know some people who are homeless and are not having a good life at all out in the cold, but *most* of us, say 95 percent of us, are living by world-historic standards really comfortable lives.) And yet at the same time most of us feel that we're at least not as rich as we want to be, or perhaps even poor, because of the fact that there are people around us who are so much richer, and in our culture unless you're really rich, you don't get any respect, you don't belong in our culture unless you have a *lot*.

And then I thought the other really good point you brought up is that poverty isn't just *not having* something. You know, if it was just *that*, it would be a fairly stupid thing. There's not really much point in *not having things*. I like the way Fr. Dubay put it in happy are you poor. He said, "poverty is a nothing-something." He compared it to readiness to read. If a child is ready to read, the child still doesn't know how to read, but he's ready to learn. And he said poverty is the same sort of thing. If someone has a certain amount of factual poverty, one isn't thereby superior to people who are not poor. But one has a "nothing-something," one is ready to experience the Lord in a way which someone who is more wealthy is probably not. And I think one of the ways in which people who are somewhat less well off are more ready is that as you said, they are more dependent on God, or rather, we're *all* the same amount dependent on God. But they *realize* that they're dependent. I remember when I was stuck on the side of a hot road waiting for a



bus that never came. And I didn't have a car, so I was dependent on this rather shaky transit system, and I didn't have a smart phone so I wasn't able to call anyone or see if any bus was ever going to come, I was running low on water, I was not feeling so well, and I was just really unhappy, just thinking, this is just terrible. So I was praying to God, "God, help get me out of this, I can't contact anybody, I don't know what's happened to the bus line." And then I realized that this kind of failure, inability to control circumstances, is exactly one of the values of poverty. That the rich, at least have an illusion that they're entirely in control, that they can direct things. Ultimately, every one of us is going to have to face death. At which we'll lose control. And poor people are used to that. Used to finding themselves in situations in which they just have to pray, and possibly ask other people for help. Because I don't carry a smartphone, I have to ask other people, "Oh, could you make a call" . . . you know, it always feels annoying to have to ask them, but I've become more dependent on other people, for rides, for phone usage, become more dependent on God for things going well. Therefore in one sense we're practicing for that last moment, at which we will all lose control. *All living is a practice for dying*. And with more poverty, if we don't fall into that ungrateful, unhappy, envious spirit that can affect the poor in first world countries, if we don't fall into that and are instead grateful for what we have, and embrace our dependence on God and on other people, we will have a preparation for that moment when we meet Him.

Jason: [41:13](#) Yeah, I think that goes back to what, you said Peter. You know, Gospel poverty is an internal *disposition*, it's not an external state, right? Meaning, at some levels it's how you *think* about your things and exactly what you're saying, Malcolm, how do you think about your dependence? Are you dependent on God or are you dependent on your money, are you dependent on your self? And that's the beautiful thing about this charism of Gospel poverty, is that it teaches us so much more than just living simply, it teaches us to depend on God, and yet at the same time, it also makes us thankful, and grateful to God for what he does provide to us. One great example there is that our first foreign mission experience, living in the foreign missions was in Costa Rica, where they have full government provided health care there. And so you would think that's a great thing, you know it takes care of so much sickness and takes care of that kind of poverty. And yet, the people that we worked with they were either A. Nicaraguans who had fled from the utter destitution and violence happening there, or B. they were just really poor. And the interesting thing that we found out there was that they would go to the hospital and they would be complaining that you know "I'm having these horrible headaches, or this horrible leg pain, there's something obviously wrong," or even they would have cancer, and the doctors would send them home with Tylenol. Vs. if you were well to do, you would go in and the doctor would refer you to an oncologist and you would receive chemo. And we got this kind of insight because my wife was diagnosed with cancer in Costa Rica, and we actually were able, we were blessed enough, to go to a private doctor who said he had to leave that system because of that inequality that was happening. And so he told us basically, you can't afford chemo here, go back to the States. And yet even in that time of desolation that we were in, we were so grateful that the fact that we had a place to go back to. We had a medical system that we could fall into. And it was completely taken care of for us here. God completely took care of this for us. We tried to do our own works of trying to find insurance for ourselves, and God

provided for us Medicaid! And that's again living in solidarity with the poor . . . and we were able to come back and get into the system and my wife was able to receive chemo, and though it wasn't the best hospital in the city, it put her cancer in remission. And we can thank the Lord for that! And we can thank the Lord that we weren't one of our poor neighbors in Costa Rica who would be sent home with Tylenol. And yet we can also grieve that. And so there's so many of those other ideas that are wrapped up in this idea that it's not just the physical state that you're in, and we can't relativize . . . we can't say, well, I'm not as poor as *this* person, which you said Malcolm there, but yet we have to understand what God is trying to teach us in *our own* acceptance of voluntary poverty. That's I think the beautiful thing about what . . . Matthew uses the words "poor in spirit" in the beatitude that I mentioned earlier. The first beatitude is "Blessed are the poor in *spirit*." Which is a little different from Luke's version, "blessed are the poor." Right? And then the Catholic Church comes in and says, that "poor in spirit," *that* is voluntary poverty. They actually define that in the catechism, I remember seeing that somewhere, I don't have the reference with me right now. And so there's a difference in how we understand poverty because of where we come from, but also in living into that voluntary poverty, or Gospel poverty. We can understand the different levels of poverty that there are. One of the . . . in Pope Francis's encyclical that he just wrote, Fratelli Tutti, he has a great line that I think defines a lot of what we are talking about; it's in paragraph 21. He says wealth has increased, but together with inequality, with the result that *new forms* of poverty are emerging. And that's so true. There are so many new forms of poverty; you all mentioned it, the inequalities, the not being heard, there's so much spiritual poverty now, even in wealth. New forms of poverty are emerging and we have to be able recognize those. He goes on to say that the claim that the modern world has reduced poverty is made by measuring poverty with criteria from the past that do not correspond to our present day realities. In other times, for example, lack of access to electrical energy was not considered a sign of poverty, nor was it hardship at the time. Going to exactly what you were talking about Malcolm, in they didn't have electricity in the time of ancient Rome! But yet poverty, he goes on to say, poverty must be understood and gauged in the context of the opportunities available in each period. And so we have to understand, just as I was talking about with the medical systems, we have to understand that there are different kinds of poverties, there are different levels of poverty, and yet God reaches into each of those and helps bring you closer to him in whatever your time of need is.

Malcolm: [47:32](#) Jason, that's a great quote from Pope Francis. Because it's so true. In one sense, here in the United States, we're becoming, we're all becoming, poorer and poorer even as our material wealth continues to grow, (albeit in an unequal and undistributed fashion.) Because our growing wealth has destroyed things that were once taken for granted. So for today, it's a big problem, (we've seen this during the COVID pandemic), if they shut down child care, a lot of people are really in trouble. And that means that people who can't afford child care at all, ever, are in a lot of trouble. But sixty years ago, that wasn't a problem because one income was perfectly sufficient for families, and if the one income wasn't, there was a social network that would take care of children. A lot less people used child care, had to pay for child care, sixty years ago. And that is because we've become much poorer in a social sense. And I think this is a

really important point, because if we're going to try to encourage people in this culture to become factually more poor, we have to show them we're really replacing one thing with another, better, thing. And that, of course, ultimately is the love and grace of God. But it's also dependence on one another. We're replacing individual material wealth, as we spoke of in our last podcast, with community wealth, with communal relationships and strengths that would allow people to be taken care of. Because I remember trying to talk to a friend about poverty and about how the Gospel rejects security, and I used that parable that you brought up, Peter, about the rich fool, who fills his barns and says, ah, now! And I said, in our culture, we all do that. We all save up for retirement. We save a lot of money for something that might never happen. You could get run over by a car tomorrow, and yet instead of aiding the poor, or having a good time with your neighbor, you are stuffing a bank account in hopes of having many years of leisure to come. And the friend was disgruntled, the friend said, you know, I'm crushed in debt, running around doing all these things, medical bills, I *need* security! I'm in no mood to hear that security is a bad thing! And that made me reflect, and I realized that my friend was right, of course. Human beings need security, and yet we have less and less of it, even as we start stuffing our barns, metaphorically speaking, stuffing our bank accounts or whatever else it is that we think is going to provide individual security for us. Because in a healthy society it is security for *us*, not security for *me*. And so as well as the replacing of dependence on material things with dependence on God, we're talking about a world which has more connection even if it has less material wealth, and that less material wealth is only survivable, in the earthly sense, if we do at the same time build that community of solidarity and cooperation.

Peter: [51:06](#) Yeah, this wow, brings up so many points for reflection. But one thing that comes to mind is how Jesus he really calls us to *follow* Him. To follow Him in His poverty and when He tells that rich young man, you know, there is one thing that you lack, go and sell all that you have and give to the poor and come and follow me, that to me is something we need to hear again. To follow Jesus in his *poverty* and as we do, let go of the things, the many things that we're attached to, that from another point of view might appear to be our gods. You know, we might claim that we're Christians when we go to church every Sunday, but at the end of the day what are the things, like you both have mentioned, that we rely on, that we look to, that we spend our time with every day? I would say most of us it's many different material things, or our comfort, our pleasure, our ego and our image, facebook, I think of all the different types of social media . . . and Pope Francis, I think he has some great words to say on these things that are producing a new type of poverty, a poverty of person. A greater insecurity, actually. I mean it's incredible how insecure I think young people are, how difficult it is for young people to enter into a face to face encounter and conversation apart from their phones, apart from their computers, because of how they might appear, how they might be judged. I think poverty invites us into an acceptance of ourselves, a humility that allows us to be truly who we are without, like I mentioned before, without putting on any pretense, and I think one of the avenues that poverty can lead us to is a generosity of person, you know, the less we have, it seems to me, the more we're able to give of our selves and focus on the needs of those around us. So it goes back to that point, Malcolm I think you were speaking of, that we can't just . . . we need to replace the lack

of material things with something greater, and be witness to something that transcends the false securities that material goods bring. Because if people don't see that, why would they ever be attracted to the God that we proclaim? If they don't see that what we proclaim is so much greater than the material goods that people grasp after, that people surround their lives with . . . so our poverty in a way needs to be coupled, needs to be filled, like you both have mentioned, with a humble dependence on God that brings abundance, you know He came that we might have life, and life to the full. And paradoxically, he invites us to let go of material things, in order to experience that abundance. And so I'm reflecting on the great connection that poverty has to generosity of person. Being able to give of our time, and give of the things that we do have. That's one thing I noticed when I was abroad and involved in service: that people were very generous with the little that they had. It was quite astonishing, you know, they weren't reluctant to give to their neighbors the little that they had. Whereas I find in America we don't even want to go near the homeless man on the street because he might ask us for some money. And rarely do we want to know who needs what, or have others be a burden on us. I don't think though that we want to discount the very difficult nature of life for a lot of people in America. I know you mentioned, Malcolm, your guess that about 95 percent of people live in comfort in this country, but I do think there are a lot of people who are just trying to make ends meet, working two jobs a day, you know, and have very little time to enjoy, the material things that this world, that our culture offers. So I guess one of the things that I'm seeing more and more is that this individualist lifestyle in which we try to provide for ourselves is broken and leaves us exhausted and poor in a negative sense; in need of so many things, in need of attention, in need of relationship, in need of God, whereas I think, to bring this conversation back into this intentional community element, that if we let go of material things, in light of relationships, or in light of entering more deeply into community with those around us, it becomes less of a burden to have less. I think Jason, you kind of spoke on that just with your family dynamic. And I know for me, even though I'm living kind of a single, consecrated life, apart from a larger family, I've found that this poverty, this voluntary simplicity, leads itself into a deeper relationship with the things of heaven, and the things of God, the things of eternity, that bring true and lasting joy. And there's a witness of that to other people, as I travel throughout the world, as I meet and encounter others. That I think speaks of the need for and the place of God in our lives.

Malcolm:57:41 Peter, you're very right; even though most people in our country can feed themselves have some kind of shelter against the weather that's probably heated and you know, their basic needs are taken care of, and they even might be considered to be doing fairly well if they were suddenly transported with all their things to some poorer country, you're very right that they are plagued by that insecurity, they're constantly struggling to make ends meet. I remember recently the Governor here in Colorado extended a ban on evictions, because he said that because of the economic damage from the pandemic, a huge number of Colorado families were in imminent danger of being evicted, ending up on the street with nowhere to go. And even outside of crazy times like a pandemic, there's a huge number of people who are always right on the edge of becoming homeless. And don't know from week to week where the food and housing are going to come from. So even though most in our country do ultimately

end up with enough, it is spiritually degrading, the conditions that a large percent of our fellow countrymen live under. And I think that that's a good transition to our next podcast, where we'll be talking about what our economic life together looks like, what our economy is, our provisioning of material goods for ourselves, and what it should look like in the light of Christ and what we can do about that as a community. So thanks so much Peter and Jason for joining us today, I think it was a really great conversation, and I'm so pleased that you were both able to join me and give your insights.

Jason: Thank you Malcolm for inviting me, I hope I was able to contribute to the conversation, and thank you Peter for joining us as well.

Peter: Yeah, thank you both, guys, it was really a blessing and an honor. So, yeah, have a wonderful blessed rest of your week.

Malcolm: You too, and thanks again. I look forward to our next podcast.