

The Power of Poverty and the Beauty of Mercy - Part II

S08E06

Sr. Miriam James Heidland: [00:00:00] Welcome to part two of our continued conversation with Fr. Mark Mary. If you haven't heard part one, you'll want to tune in to season eight, episode five to get caught up in all the wonderful things that he had to share with us. So settle in and welcome to part two.

Hello and welcome to season two eight of the abiding together podcast. Abiding Together is a place where you can find connection, rest and encouragement on your journey with Jesus Christ. My name is Sister Miriam James Heidland, and each and every week I am joined by two of my very dearest friends, Heather Khym and Michelle Benzinger. This podcast is born out of our friendship and sharing all kinds of things together: our walk with Jesus, our insights, the lessons we are *still* learning our joys, sorrows, tears, and laughter. And you are most welcome on the journey with us. You can find out more information about all of our episodes at abidingtogetherpodcast.com. But for now, grab a cup of coffee, settle in, and welcome home.

I'm wondering father, maybe if we could shift gears just a little bit, since you're speaking about your mission in Honduras, which is so incredibly beautiful. If we could talk about from the vow of poverty to how you guys live it out, especially. It is such a beautiful witness of how you live out poverty and serving the poor, and I think a lot of people don't really know what to do when we talk about serving the poor. Who are the poor or what do I do? Could you share a bit about that with our listeners and how you guys serve the poor and the corporal works of mercy and how that's the call really for every person.

Fr. Mark Mary, CFR: [00:01:37] Yeah! That's a great question. There's a lot, there's a lot to it. Maybe I'll start again, kind of root it in our, in our own life. When we began in 1987, our founders were all Capuchin, which is like a different Franciscan community, like Padre Pio. One of the things that the friars made rule was that we had to live in a neighborhood noted for material poverty. In other words, like we always wanted the poor to be able to walk and knock on our door or ring the doorbell. We wanted to be accessible to them, we wanted to live life with them. To be honest the gifts of, the joys of, even the struggles of living with and serving the poor, it's bigger than the scope of this conversation. For St. Francis, one of the first things he did was after his conversion is he went and he lived amongst and he loved the lepers. These outcasts, what he found is he found God, right? He found God, and it captivated his heart. Like the humility of God who would be present where man, like didn't desire to be. Like, he went to the poorest of the poor, the suffering of the suffering, sort of the lowest of the low and what he found there in his brothers and sisters was he found God. Which of course we know is rooted in the scriptures: that which you did for the least of my brothers you did it for me. Like there's a real way in which Jesus is there. Our Father Benedict, one of our founders, used to talk about sort of like poetically the poor as the eighth sacrament. That in the poor, this is a real place of encounter with, with Jesus. I honestly feel this is probably pretty strong, but I do feel that Pope Francis has said this in *Evangelii, Gaudium*, no matter who you are, no matter what you're doing, you have a vocation to being in contact with the poor to some degree. Again, this is strong words but I do actually believe it. Like if our encounter with Christ, there's a privation to it if it doesn't

include encounter with Christ in the poor. There's something of the face of Jesus, which is still in shadow if we don't encounter him in his fullness, including his presence in the poor. So that's the first idea or thought any feedback, processing, thoughts?

Heather Khym: [00:03:48] I think for many people, you know, there's a fear around encountering the poor. And I think that can be rooted in a lot of different things. Just the fear of the unknown or, you know, for safety or whatever it might be, but maybe just the fear of, of not knowing what to do, not knowing how to provide. And it reminds me of this beautiful story of mother Teresa. Where she encountered this man on the street, who was, I mean, he was dying. He was covered in sores. He was starving. And as she was approaching him, she was questioning, you know, I should have something to give him. Like, I don't have any food. Like Lord, like you tell us not to bring anything and here this man needs something. And she just said to him, you know, I don't have anything to give you, but Jesus, and she just hugged him and he just began to weep and he said, no one has touched me in years. But that was exactly what he needed was Jesus in her. And I think sometimes for many of us, we make it more complicated than it is. And I'm just curious for you, if you had any resistance in encountering the poor and just some of the beauty that you've been able to see.

Fr. Mark Mary, CFR: [00:04:54] Yeah. Amen. The poco poco, it goes with this as well. Like it's okay to be where you are and to make the next best step. Uh, the first big thing I did was when I was like 18 or so, and I went and lived and volunteered at a homeless shelter for like two weeks. And I was super nervous and super afraid and super intimidated. And it was just like, I just, I don't know what to do or what to say. And it was kind of paralyzing to me. And so I was there and I don't know, I probably did a mediocre job, but as time goes on, like you kind of learn. I was down in, I was on a mission trip with some Focus missionaries down to Trinidad. And one of the things we did is we went and visited like sort of a, almost like a hospice where people like really sick and suffering and for me, so I was a priest at the time already. I had never really been in that environment. And so I was, I was kind of shy and hesitant. I just didn't know what to do. But one of the young women who was a college student, he had volunteered in the hospital, she had like a ton of experience. And so she just, she just went up to them and talk to them normally, held their hand. She just learned it by doing it right. And so we are where we are, but we want to keep making the next best step. And I think you nailed it, like. Part of the fear is just the unknown. But as you get some experience, the unknown becomes the known.

Michelle Benzinger: [00:06:19] Yeah. And I think the unknown becomes the known and I think it is just also seeing people. I think seeing them in their human dignity and recognizing them, and this is where we just, the poor are always around us, you know, we have the spiritual poor and the material poor. Like we say a lot of times allowing the Holy spirit to do the heavy lifting, to say open my eyes and He will open your eyes and to see the poor, both physically materially and spiritually. To see around you and how you can just, it is like you were saying Heather, but first it's recognizing the human dignity and worth of each person. It's fun because my husband and I both have served in developing countries and third world missions. And that is not my natural habitat. I mean, but I can do it and I love it. And there's beauty in it. Like if my husband had his way, we'd be serving full time on mission, but I prayed harder and the Lord brought us back. Just kidding, but I love it. I absolutely love it. And I don't have a lot of fear when it comes to even encountering the poor. Like we have a very, very big homeless population here where we are, because it's warm and it's Florida. And our kids know, like when we see a homeless person, we stop, we give money, but we

talk to them, we ask them. And the biggest question is, what is your name? Just ask them, what is your name? And I think for us, it is very important when it comes to dealing with the poor. Which I had to learn the lesson the hard way, because I felt like when we were going to developing countries and we were serving the poor, like, I almost felt like here I am the savior, like, Savior Jr. Here I come. That people aren't projects, people are gifts. You know, people are made in the goodness and likeness of the Lord, and they are not projects they're individuals and they're gifts, and that it is a grace and an invitation when we are able to just come alongside them and offer whatever assistance the Holy spirit prompts us to offer. And there's a beauty. And then it goes back to the scripture, you know, in Luke: it says give and it will be given to you, shaken down, pressed together. And when you get to participate with the Holy spirit in that, it always comes back where it is: you get more than you give. But going back to what Father Mark Mary said earlier, I don't want to romanticize it or sanitize it because it's not easy. You know, it is not easy and there's a lot of stuff there and it is not an easy road. Yes. So, yeah. Sister, what are your thoughts?

Sr. Miriam James Heidland: [00:08:41] I I'm really curious if you could share Father about your current mission, you live in Harlem I think? It would be really interesting for our listeners to hear what is your day to day life like, and when you talk about living with the poor and having them knock on your front door. I would love to hear just what your day to day life is like and how y'all encounter Christ in the poor.

Fr. Mark Mary, CFR: [00:09:00] So I, I literally just moved and, um, cause I I've been in the Bronx for the last couple of years. I just moved to Harlem. Technically it's like my fourth friary in two years. So the whole, the whole pilgrimage thing for me is, has been very real. So we're, we're just getting started at this new friary, but maybe I'll share a little bit from my time in the Bronx, particularly with one of the things we do is we run a homeless shelter, right. So we're still kind of in the wake of COVID. So we had the chance to be quarantined for a little over a hundred days with, it was like 35 homeless men. Right. And that, and we just got to do life with them and be with them 24/7. And so that was not, we're not going to romanticize that one. That has some ups and some downs, you know, it was real, but, but it was, what would I say here? I want to share maybe, um, I'll share. Yeah, I'll share one story. Can I share one story from the shelter, even though it wasn't that time? There's a lot to share from that quarantine time, but I think maybe to be a little bit more poignant is, um. This is kind of part of the joy of it. And again, it's this like front row seat to the work of God thing is. We had one guy come in and under normal operating procedure, whatever. Um, we typically have the same guys. The bed opens up. You can come in, we receive new guys, check them in, have a little conversation. We have one guest arrive who had just come out of prison. He'd been in Rikers Island for like 25 years. And, uh, All tatted up and just kind of a tough dude. And you could see the guys who are fresh out of prison because they still, they still carry themselves with like this defensive, with, I've never been my understanding, is like prison, you're always kind of on guard, right? You're never really safe. You're never home. And so they come with this sort of insecurity and suspicion. And he was a rough dude and he was with us for a couple months and he struggled with some of the rules and he struggled with some of the other people and whatnot. But one of the things we do as they come in is we get their birthdays and we always celebrate their birthdays together. We just finished dinner, all the lights go out. We light the birthday candles on this cake that we had made just for him. One of the friary priest brings it out and all the guests, everybody is singing together happy birthday to him. And we put the cake in front of him and he looks down and he just

begins to weep. He just begins to ball. You know, we finished happy birthday. He hasn't blown out his candles, the lights slowly go back on and we're all just kind of like watching, like what, like what's going on. And he says, um, I've never had a birthday cake, like with my name on it before.

And so, you know, we had this cake made just for him. So it had his name on it. And just the reception of this gift that was like, for him, with his name on it, like he'd never experienced it before. And it was, he was just never the same in the shelter. He had a new freedom, a new peace, a new sort of everything. Right. And to be there and to see that and to be ministers of that and to allow God to work in that way, like where a grown man, who's a tough dude for the first time sort of experiences, a love that is custom made. That's just for him, that has his name on it. Like, and that happens all the time in all these different areas like that. It is, it's an incredible privilege. Incredible joy.

Michelle Benzinger: [00:12:25] I absolutely love that. I mean, isn't that totally scripture I've called you and you are mine. And to experience that for that man to witness it, I think is just powerful if not, but it's a holy privilege. It's a Holy privilege that you get to see. And I guess also for most of our listeners, they are thinking, okay, but I'm not a CFR friar. I'm not called to grow a beard or wear a habit. Or, you know, all that kind of stuff. And so what is it like the corporal works of mercy. So what does it look like for our life? Majority of our listeners are not called to serve the poor radically, like you are. So what does it look like to feed the hungry and shelter, the homeless and clothe the naked. Like we have that invitation also to these corporal works of mercy. We have these invitations to do that. So what does it look like practically to do that? Sister. Why are you laughing at me?

Sr. Miriam James Heidland: [00:13:24] Cause you said ne-cked.

Fr. Mark Mary, CFR: [00:13:26] I was trying to be cool. I was trying to be grown up and then I saw Sister.

Michelle Benzinger: [00:13:36] You're never grown up. Never

Fr. Mark Mary, CFR: [00:13:41] Thank you for that, Michelle.

Sr. Miriam James Heidland: [00:13:49] Did she just say neck-ed?

Michelle Benzinger: [00:13:50] I'm going to leave you a little thing. You're naked and unashamed, girl.

Sr. Miriam James Heidland: [00:13:54] We needed that, thank you. It will never be the same. We're never the same. Now we'll always use it. I'll never hear that story ever again when Jesus does that in Mass, I'll just start giggling anyway.

Heather Khym: [00:14:06] What was the question?

Fr. Mark Mary, CFR: [00:14:08] Something about the naked?

Sr. Miriam James Heidland: [00:14:12] Well, because before we started recording this father, you were actually sharing something very beautiful about mamas, about mothers. And we would just love to have our listeners blessed by your words and your heart for mothers. So if you could just repeat that, that would be a huge blessing to our listeners.

Fr. Mark Mary, CFR: [00:14:25] And maybe just to sort of back up real quick and I'll move there is like Michelle's saying, or like we do all have a vocation to love the poor. This is Matthew 25, right? Like he's separating the winners and the losers and what's the one thing he's looking at: like when I was hungry, did you feed me? When I was naked, did you clothe me? When I was thirsty, did you give me to drink? Boom. Let's go to heaven. If you didn't do those things, it's like see you later. So we do all have it, but of course it's going to look different for a lot of us. But I don't want to miss the ways in which the, if you will, the ordinary is extraordinary. And the, the Lord is in the stuff of everyday life. I first started processing this and thinking about it with a dear friend of mine, who's got six boys at this point and her and her husband are like radical, hardcore missionaries who went and spent a bunch of time kind of all over the world. But as they settled down and became sort of mom and dad, there was a struggle of like, am I doing enough? And this kind of just got me praying, I think, cause I knew instinctually. It is, but what I want to say is this is like Matthew 25, right? Like when I was hungry, you fed me. When I was thirsty you gave me to drink. When I was naked, you clothed me. When I was in prison, you visited me. When I was a foreigner, you welcomed me. Like, if you're a parent, you're doing all of these things every day. And so when you give your son, your daughter food to eat, you did it, but that what you did for the least of my brothers, you did it for me. Like when you feed your child, you're doing that. You're building the kingdom of God. You're loving Jesus. He's there as well. Like when you're giving them to drink, it's Jesus also who you're serving and loving. They're like when, when the baby's crying at night in the crib and you get up and you lose your sleep. When was I in prison? Right? Like, they're imprisoned in the crib. When I was in prison you visited me, you're doing that. You did it to me. When was I a foreigner and you welcomed me, like, hello. Like, obviously I've never been pregnant, but it looks like we got somebody, like you're welcoming somebody pretty intimately into your world. Like you did it to me. Uh, when I was on naked and you clothed me, right? Like you're changing, you're changing diapers. Like you did it to me. And just not to miss the dignity of it. It's often hidden. It's often humble, which is often where the Lord likes to take up his abode. But that is also, that's the stuff of discipleship. Those are the works of mercy as well.

Michelle Benzinger: [00:16:50] I love that. Yeah. Sister, what are your thoughts? I could tell you're a little head spinning.

Sr. Miriam James Heidland: [00:16:55] I love that because sometimes people really feel overwhelmed and they're saying to themselves like, yes, I have six kids, what am I supposed to do now? And it becomes like a burdensome thing. Uh, you know, one of our friends Fr. Mark Touns, he always talks about staying present to the present moment. You know, stay present to the present moment and all we can do is what we're doing. And we're welcoming the people around us. And like, I think Michelle was saying earlier, we speak about the poor always being with us. And that's always true. There's poor within us and there's poor exteriorly and Christ is present in all. And he's always bringing us into deeper communion. And I'm so glad father, this is why we wanted to spend time with you. We made this episode two parts, so we could hear your heart and how you serve and how you love and the gift that you've received and how that blesses the world. Just the witness of your life as a priest, as a religious brother, as somebody who's poured out their heart to serve the poor, to see Christ in the poor. Which even as simple as giving somebody a birthday cake with their name on it, it makes me feel eternal difference. And that that's not lost, that's incredibly beautiful. We're going to jump into our one things here in a second, but Michelle, Heather, do you have

any, anything else before we give Father the last say, before we jump into our one things. Heather?

Heather Khym: [00:18:01] I just want to say thank you for your vocation Father, and thank you for being willing to be with us and share some of your story with us. For many people, they don't have relationships with priests, nevermind friars, and they don't know what it's like. And just thank you for being real and accessible and for the gift of your life for all of us, really, for the poor. It's inspiring.

Fr. Mark Mary, CFR: [00:18:24] Thank you Heather.

Michelle Benzinger: [00:18:25] It's such a treat to have you here. My annoying little brother, but it is. And I mean, I always tell you, like, even our meeting was such a providential thing and you truly have become family to my family and therefore Heather and Sister, because they're part of our family. So it's beautiful to bring you in the family. But I think one last question, before we go into our one things, we just finished celebrating St. Francis's feast day. And the beautiful charge that Jesus asked of Saint Francis to go and rebuild his church. So if there is one aspect our listeners could do to participate with Christ in that mission to go and rebuild his church, what do you think that would be right now?

Fr. Mark Mary, CFR: [00:19:05] Honestly, it's pray. The first thing, the most important thing that Francis did in building of the church at any point in the time was to be a man of prayer. And he talked about the friars, above all things, are to seek the Holy spirit in his Holy operation, in their lives, above all things and everything else is subject to that. We just, we need to pray and we're not in it alone. The Lord is big and the Lord is strong, and he's got broad shoulders and he'll invite us to have a part to play, but he'll do the heavy lifting, but we just gotta be in that relationship. If you want to change the world first and foremost, like we just have to be men and women who are men and women who pray. And that's, that's kinda that's. That's Saint Francis. That's my heart.

Michelle Benzinger: [00:19:47] Amen. Amen father, we would love if you would give our listeners a priestly blessing before we go into our one things.

Fr. Mark Mary, CFR: [00:19:56] Alright. Let's pray in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Heavenly father. We love you. We bless you. We thank you for your goodness, for your fatherhood. We thank you for your beautiful daughters and the work you're doing through this podcast. And we entrust you all of our listeners as well. Through the prayers of the Blessed Virgin Mary, holy father st. Francis, and our Holy mother, Clare may almighty God bless you all in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Sr. Miriam James Heidland: [00:20:22] Amen.

Heather Khym: [00:20:23] Amen.

Michelle Benzinger: [00:20:24] Hello, Abiding Together Podcast listeners. So when we originally recorded our episode with Fr. Mark Mary, we thought it was just going to be a one part episode, but the conversation was so good and so rich that we made it two parts. But what we didn't do is record two, one things. So I am recording and the girls don't know this. I am recording the one things for everybody. And I am picking the one things for each of them

and they don't even know it. Okay. So let's start. So for Heather's one thing last week was her Canadian Thanksgiving eh? Is that a good Canadian little thing? Okay. Anyway, so they had Canadian Thanksgiving in their new house. And so Heather sent us pictures. So I'm going to post that. Also I'm giving Heather two, one things cause she just needs extra love. Also Heather texted us the Maverick City Music, their volume three, and it is amazing. And she texted it to sister and I with crying emojis. So obviously it really moved her. So Heather gets the two one things. Sisters, one thing is a book that I actually gave her for her birthday. Ha ha. It is Mother Mary Francis's book about Mary called Cause of our Joy. And it's walking day by day with our Lady. Now, if sister was saying this, she would probably throw in some beautiful Latin term about our Lady, but I won't do that because I will butcher the Latin. But it is a beautiful book about walking with our Lady and her spiritual motherhood. And I will post the link in our show notes and then Fr. Mark Mary, his one thing would be about all the amazing women that make his vocation holy namely, *me*. And all my feminine genius and all the other feminine geniuses in his life that just make him a better priest and a better man. He's going to love this don't you think? And my one thing is actually the three people that I got to record this past podcast with. I don't know what I would do without the three of them. Heather and her wisdom and her longevity of friendship. Sister Mariam has just been just such a soul sister, especially in this last year, walking really closely and just, um, tender parts of my heart and Fr. Mark, Mary, like we said earlier, he is the little, kind of annoying, little brother that I never know I wanted, but he has become really family to me and my husband and my kids. And he is a gift and his priesthood is a gift. And the CFRs - that religious order is a gift, not only to me, but to the church as a whole. So there is the one things and they have no idea I'm doing this, but I have all the power this week. Have a great week listeners. We love you!

Sr. Miriam James Heidland: [00:23:06] Thank you so much for listening to this week's episode. If you liked it, would you please share it with a friend? We encourage you to head over to our website, abidingtogetherpodcast.com, where you can find all the show notes, links to our one thing, transcripts, group discussion questions for each episode, and beautiful mugs, t-shirts, journals, and prints in our shop. There, you can also subscribe to receive our weekly email with links to each new episode and all of this content. We'd love to connect on social media and invite you to follow us on Instagram, facebook and Twitter, so you can catch inspiring and reflections every day. You're also welcome to join our private Facebook group and dive deeper into discussions with our fellow listeners. If the podcast has blessed you, would you prayerfully consider financially supporting us? The Abiding Together Podcast is only available due to the generous support of our listeners. There are significant costs associated with creating this content such as tech support, design, website, equipment, and hired staff that we need to be able to continue offering content to you. Abiding Together is a nonprofit 501c3, and all donations are tax-deductible. You can make donations of any amount through a website called Patreon, or you can send us a check directly, if that's easier. If you donate \$15 or more per month on our Patreon page, you become a tribe member and you will receive monthly individual videos from Michelle, Heather and I, as well as other exclusive content, recipes, playlists, downloadable prints, and more. You can find all the information about Patreon at patreon.com/abidingtogetherpodcast.com Thank you. And God bless you.