

## Session Three **The Poor and Needy**

Here is a prayer from the Armenian Church's Service for the Evening Hour. Read it over a few times, and then answer the questions that follow.



Increase in us O Lord Almighty, faith, hope and charity and all deeds of virtue **so that** *we might always obey your ordinances by day and by night* according to your beneficent will, and **so that** *we may be worthy to beseech you for the salvation of our souls* and for our spiritual life, O Lord, and to find grace and mercy from you and, giving thanks, to glorify the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, now and always and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

The phrase **so that**, which appears twice in this prayer, means that in order for something to happen, something else must happen first. We say, "I sent my grandma some flowers so that she would know I hadn't forgotten her birthday." The flowers must be sent in order for Grandma to know that the birthday wasn't forgotten. Or we say, "I did my homework so that I would have time to watch the show." The homework must be finished in order for me to have time for the TV show.

What does "so that" tell us, in this prayer, must be done in order for two other things to follow? What are the two things that will follow? In other words, what must we do in order for these two other things to follow? What similarities are there between this prayer and the Bible reading from *Matthew* about the sheep and the goats?

### **Some Words from Mother Teresa**

Mother Teresa, the Roman Catholic nun who spent much of her life healing the poor in Calcutta, India, gave us words that you can also relate to the passage from *Matthew*. Read them and discuss their meaning for our lives as we try to serve others:



"When a poor person dies of hunger, it has not happened because God did not take care of him or her. It has happened because neither you nor I wanted to give the person what he or she needed. We have refused to be instruments of love in the hands of God to give the poor a piece of bread, to offer them a dress with which to ward off the cold. It has happened because we did not recognize Christ when, once more, he appeared under the guise of pain, identified with a man numb from the cold, dying of hunger, when he came in a lonely human being, in a lost child in search of a home."

### Some More Words from Mother Teresa

As we think about kinds of service, it may surprise us to know that Mother Teresa, whose work spanned much of the world and involved thousands of people, still valued small services that any of us can do:

"Old people like for others to listen to them. In some places we have groups of co-workers whose main responsibility is to listen. They visit typical homes, especially those of older people, sit down with them and let them talk and talk to give them the satisfaction of being listened to.



"The older people, I repeat, love this even though they may not have much else to say other than unimportant things—unimportant to others, obviously, not to them—that happened a long time ago.

"To listen to someone who has no one to listen is a very beautiful thing."

(Both passages taken from *In My Own Words* by Mother Teresa, compiled by Jose Luis Gonzalez-Balado, Liguori Publications, 1996.)

*Session Three*

# The Poor and Needy

## Key Concepts

1. The "poor and needy" may be those in physical, spiritual, or emotional need.
2. According to Christian teaching, helping those in need is a necessary duty, not an option.
3. There are examples of service to the poor and needy both in ancient and modern times.

## Objectives

*Students will:*

1. Read and discuss biblical and modern examples of helping the poor and needy.
2. Analyze a church prayer that says helping others is a requisite of our own salvation.
3. Enumerate ways to be helpers themselves.

What does it mean to be in need? Most of us think first of physical need, and that is often the most urgent kind of need, requiring immediate attention. But physical need is certainly not the only kind, as we will see in this session. People thrive on love and attention beyond what we give to physical needs and may survive because of it. We have all heard of overcrowded orphanages in which babies' basic physical needs are adequately met and yet they fail to thrive because their emotional needs for love and human contact go unmet.

So strongly does the Church believe that people must love each other in demonstrable ways that the teaching is that our own salvation depends on our being charitable to others. This will be shown in the session by a beautiful prayer of the Church which reflects this idea.

Part of the thrust of this session is that sometimes people have needs deeper than the ones we might immediately notice. If there is a social worker who might be able to come and talk with the class about how needs are discerned and met, invite that person to come for a short discussion-and-question time with the class during this session.

1. Open with a prayer. Discuss the class service project and the individual home projects. (15 mins)
2. Take a few minutes to brainstorm with the class by asking them to call out their immediate reactions to the phrase "people in need." What does it mean, or bring to mind? Put their responses on the board. When they have finished, look at the results. Did all or most of their responses refer to physical needs? Are there other things beside the basic physical necessities that people can be in need of? Talk about some of these. (5 mins)
3. Read together *Matthew 25:31-45*. Discuss: Are only physical needs described here? (No. The need for loving contact and support in time of trouble is also clearly expressed.) Do Jesus' listeners seem surprised by his words? (Yes—they ask, "When did we see you ...?")

## Background for Teacher

## Materials Needed

## Procedure

## Procedure

Why do you think they are surprised? (Perhaps, like many of us, they do not always see the needs of people around them.) (10 mins)

4. Now read *Mark 5:1-20*. Discuss: If we encountered this man possessed by demons, what might we think was his first need? Look at verse 15 for the clue. (We would probably say that he needed clothing to cover his nakedness.) But in the story, he does not become clothed right away. When does he become clothed? (After having the demons expelled.) What would he have done if people had tried to clothe him first? (He would have thrown them off like the chains he had sometimes been bound with.) Here is an example of how Christ met the deepest need of the person, the one that had to be taken care of before the more obvious ones could be addressed. Consider (with the participation of a social worker if you have invited someone) some questions raised by this passage:

a. Does our society do a good job of addressing the deeper needs of people before the more obvious ones? Do we in general do a good job of caring for people in need? (Opinions and suggestions on this and the next two questions will vary; you might note responses on the board for everyone to see and think about.)

b. What are some of the less obvious needs we might miss in people around us?

c. What can we do personally, and as citizens, to make ourselves and our society more responsive to needs of various kinds?

d. There may be some needs that we see but are unable to do anything about on our own. How can we respond to those needs? (Here, emphasize that we should not take on anything that is beyond our ability or knowledge to deal with. Making ourselves familiar with the various service agencies that exist—as the students did in the first session of this unit—enables us to steer a needy person to a source of help. And of course we always can give any person the best help—heartfelt and hopeful prayer for them and their need.) (15 mins)

**Procedure**

5. With the class, look at the prayer from the Service for the Evening Hour in the student text. Discuss with them the fact that the two **so that** phrases show us how we truly obey God only when we increase our "faith, hope and charity and all deeds of virtue." Similarly we become worthy to beseech God for our own salvation only when we increase those things in ourselves. So we cannot be truly obedient to God or worthy to pray for our own salvation unless we do those things.

In talking about this prayer you have a golden opportunity to show your students how the Armenian Church's prayers are always based directly on Scriptural teachings. Help them notice (and make the discovery themselves, if possible, rather than you pointing it out to them) how the prayer is related to the passage from *Matthew* that you looked at earlier. In the Bible story, Christ judges us according to what we did or did not do for others. The prayer states the very same idea, that we will be counted as obedient children of God and worthy of salvation only if we have acted with love for the good of others.

For a more modern take on this idea, look at the text from **Mother Teresa** in the student text, entitled **Some Words from Mother Teresa**. (It begins, "When a poor person . . .") Ask the class to relate this to the passage from *Matthew*. End your discussion with **Some More Words from Mother Teresa** as a suggestion for one of the small kinds of service that your students may not have thought of before.

(10 mins)

6. Review students' continuing service projects and service at home. Close with a prayer. (5 mins)