**Preferring the Periphery**

On November 19, in the Diocese of Camden, we have the Catholic Campaign for Human Development: Working from the Periphery. All parishes will have a second collection, so that we continue the original desire of the bishops of fighting against poverty. The documents note that this campaign “empowers the poor and those people on the margins so that, together they make decisions that improve their life and their neighbors.

I think the connection between two words is an interesting and fabulous thing: the periphery and the verb to prefer. It’s very clear that Pope Francis prefers the periphery. Why? Probably because he possesses a great heart and recognizes that as the successor of Christ, he has his model who preferred a ministry with and for the poor and the people on the periphery: the deaf, the blind, the lame, the mute, the leper, the disabled, the prostitute, the sinner, the tax collector, the widow, the foreigner, the orphan and others.

Why should we prefer them? Because, they are vulnerable and they lack so much. Usually they have no one to support them. They are lacking the things justice demands they enjoy. Our society doesn’t want to pay them any attention. Thus, they live alone, many in cities, homeless. But every day they speak to us in a way that causes us unease. We ask ourselves why them and not us. They remind us that we have problems in our society and we refuse the responsibility of accepting our duty to improve the situation.

Today, we can add others who live on this periphery: those addicted to drugs, to prescription medicine, to alcohol, the homeless, those whom we reject because they are attracted to members of the same sex, the divorced, those who don’t belong to this race or that club and ***especially*** those who suffer from mental illness.

A sad situation but very real! Then, we remember the Scriptures: “Those who are healthy don’t need a doctor, but those who are sick. I have not come for the just but for the sinners.” (Luke 5: 31-32) “Then, they brought him the blind and the lame in the Temple, and he healed them.” (Matthew 21: 14) “You will always have the poor with you, but me you will not always have.” (Matthew 26: 11) Christ’s ministry inspires us to be faithful in our call to be missionary disciples.

Why should we prefer the periphery? Because we are Christians and Christ did this; because they are created in the same image of Christ as we. They are our brothers and sisters. They wear the face of God. In them, we encounter Christ, on the periphery. Also, we know that it is very possible with one act of bad luck, that we find ourselves on this same periphery.

It isn’t that they are better than the healthy, but “the healthy don’t need a doctor.” When the healthy recognize their gifts and are grateful, they go to the periphery, because they prefer it and they know they can find Christ there. So, let us be generous!