



Deeply rooted in our faith tradition is a call for solidarity with the most vulnerable. Over the next 6 weeks, we will publish excerpts from Jack Jezreel's 1997 article, "Why the Preferential Option for the Poor is Not Optional," focusing on 6 steps to building solidarity with the poor:

"Father Jon Sobrino writes that there are two classes of people in the world: rich and poor. The rich do not worry if they will eat tomorrow. The poor do. Given our privilege, how do we make a preferential option for the poor?"

If you grew up like me, it's likely that you really just don't care much about poverty. Or, at least, you don't care enough to do much more than wish it didn't exist.

So here's my confession: I am the son of a rich couple. My youth was spent in contemplation of tennis and water skiing. I spent \$700 my first semester in college just on dates. I once had 30 pairs of shoes. I am, at times, utterly disinterested in matters even remotely connected with the poor. So, if you are half the scoundrel I am, consider these possibilities drawn straight from my own tarnished past.

STEP 1: It's important to directly connect to the poor.

I didn't care a thing about the world's poor until I cared about one poor person. And I only came to care about one poor person because I put myself in a place where that could happen. In my case, it happened at a day shelter for the homeless. Tom and I played cards, drank coffee (I hate coffee), and just talked (I love to talk).

After a month or so, I stopped being scared of Tom and started to like him. And, despite my 30 pairs of shoes, Tom seemed to like me. I actually gave him, hesitantly I admit, some of my shoes. I swear that's true. And, more important, I heard Tom's story. I heard the story of his cruel, broken life, and it changed me some.

I have had other such encounters since then, with the poor of Central America and with the rural poor in this country. All these experiences changed me as well. But the point is that we need at least to give ourselves an opportunity to care about somebody who's poor, somebody we probably wouldn't spend time with in the normal course of our day.

So, spend some time with an abandoned old person at a nursing home or serve and eat lunch with the guest of a soup kitchen. Become a big brother or big sister to a child growing up in inner-city poverty or in a rural shack with only one parent. --That's step one."

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