

## ADVENT REFLECTION

### *The Poor: Our Brothers and Sisters*

There was a food distribution in an area of South Sudan hit by famine. Beneficiaries had been registered and queued up to receive their ration of sorghum, the most common cereal here. When everybody left, those carrying the food relief to their homes and the team in charge of the distribution, an old woman came up. She started sieving the sand at the distribution point to get a few kilos of sorghum grains. For some reason she had not been included in the list of the beneficiaries but she was obviously one of the poor.

The old woman reminded me of the precept of the Old Testament asking those who harvested the fields not to collect everything but to leave something for the poor and the foreigners. I heard this story from a person working for a charity organization and I thought it appropriate for a reflection on a theme very much in focus in the last encyclical of Pope Francis. In "*Fratelli Tutti*", the word 'poor' occurs 49 times and it sheds light on situations, countries, individuals and groups who have so little for living that sometimes it is not enough.

It is not a question of material poverty only. How did the old woman of our story end up sieving the sand to get a few grains of cereals? In section 23 of the encyclical it is said: "Doubly poor are those women who endure situations of exclusion, mistreatment and violence, since they are frequently less able to defend their rights."

The poor challenge us, we realize that there is something unjust there, there is something of which they are deprived and that there is a call for us. We do not feel at peace if we remain indifferent. It would not be a true Advent of the Lord if we did not give a thought to these Brothers and Sisters of ours. For some of us this Advent could be a call to do something with the poor or to participate to an initiative of the poor to change their status.

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