

20 Highlights From “Dilexi te,” on Love for the Poor

Pope Leo XIV reminds us that charity “is the source that must inspire and guide every effort to resolve the structural causes of poverty.” In the apostolic exhortation “Dilexi te,” he offers a reflection in continuity with the encyclical “Dilexit nos.” Below are several key points from this letter for personal reflection.

11/14/2025

1. Small gestures of affection: “No sign of affection, even the smallest, will ever be forgotten, especially if it is shown to those who are suffering, lonely or in need, as was the Lord at that time.” (DT 4).

2. Hearing God in the poor: “This is not a matter of mere human kindness but a revelation: contact with those who are lowly and powerless is a fundamental way of encountering the Lord of history” (DT 5).

3. God’s heart: “In hearing the cry of the poor, we are asked to enter into the heart of God, who is always concerned for the needs of his children, especially those in greatest need” (DT 8).

4. The many forms of poverty: “In fact, there are many forms of poverty: the poverty of those who lack material means of subsistence, the poverty of those who are socially

marginalized and lack the means to give voice to their dignity and abilities, moral and spiritual poverty, cultural poverty, the poverty of those who find themselves in a condition of personal or social weakness or fragility, the poverty of those who have no rights, no space, no freedom” (DT 9).

5. Transforming the culture: “A concrete commitment to the poor must also be accompanied by a change in mentality that can have an impact at the cultural level. In fact, the illusion of happiness derived from a comfortable life pushes many people towards a vision of life centered on the accumulation of wealth and social success at all costs, even at the expense of others and by taking advantage of unjust social ideals and political-economic systems that favor the strongest” (DT 11).

6. Evangelization: “The fact that some dismiss or ridicule charitable works, as if they were an obsession on the part of a few and not the burning heart of the Church’s mission, convinces me of the need to go back and re-read the Gospel, lest we risk replacing it with the wisdom of this world” (DT 15).

7. A preferential option for the poor: “This ‘preference’ never indicates exclusivity or discrimination towards other groups, which would be impossible for God. It is meant to emphasize God’s actions, which are moved by compassion toward the poverty and weakness of all humanity. Wanting to inaugurate a kingdom of justice, fraternity and solidarity, God has a special place in his heart for those who are discriminated against and oppressed, and he asks us, his Church, to make a decisive and

radical choice in favor of the weakest” (DT 16).

8. Reflecting divine charity: “Even in cases where there is no explicit reference to God, the Lord himself teaches that every act of love for one’s neighbor is in some way a reflection of divine charity: ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me’ (*Mt 25:40*)” (DT 26).

9. Generosity benefits the giver: “The word of God reminds those of us not normally prone to benevolent and disinterested gestures, that generosity to the poor actually benefits those who exercise it: God has a special love for them” (DT 33).

10. Reaching God: “From the first centuries, the Fathers of the Church recognized in the poor a privileged way to reach God, a special way to meet him. Charity shown to those in need was not only seen as a moral

virtue, but a concrete expression of faith in the incarnate Word” (DT 39).

You might light: Ebook of “Dilexi te,” Pope Leo XIV’s first apostolic exhortation, on love for the poor

11. The sick: “The Christian presence among the sick reveals that salvation is not an abstract idea, but concrete action” (DT 52).

12. Human work: “In [St. John Paul II’s] encyclical *Laborem Exercens*, he forthrightly stated that ‘human work is a key, probably the essential key, to the whole social question’” (DT 87).

13. Charity is a force for change: “Charity has the power to change reality; it is a genuine force for

change in history. It is the source that must inspire and guide every effort to ‘resolve the structural causes of poverty,’ and to do so with urgency” (DT 91).

14. Effective witness: “The concern for the purity of the faith demands giving the answer of effective witness in the service of one’s neighbor, the poor and the oppressed in particular, in an integral theological fashion” (DT 98).

15. Letting ourselves be evangelized by the poor: “In light of this, it is evident that all of us must ‘let ourselves be evangelized’ by the poor and acknowledge ‘the mysterious wisdom which God wishes to share with us through them.’ Growing up in precarious circumstances, learning to survive in the most adverse conditions, trusting in God with the assurance that no one else takes them seriously, and

helping one another in the darkest moments, the poor have learned many things that they keep hidden in their hearts. Those of us who have not had similar experiences of living this way certainly have much to gain from the source of wisdom that is the experience of the poor” (DT 102).

16. A path to renewal within the Church: “One of the priorities of every movement of renewal within the Church has always been a preferential concern for the poor. In this sense, her work with the poor differs in its inspiration and method from the work carried out by any other humanitarian organization” (DT 103).

17. Silent teachers of humility: “Not infrequently, our prosperity can make us blind to the needs of others, and even make us think that our happiness and fulfillment depend on ourselves alone, apart from others.

In such cases, the poor can act as silent teachers for us, making us conscious of our presumption and instilling within us a rightful spirit of humility” (DT 108).

18. Solidarity: “By her very nature the Church is in solidarity with the poor, the excluded, the marginalized and all those considered the outcast of society. The poor are at the heart of the Church because ‘our faith in Christ, who became poor, and was always close to the poor and the outcast, is the basis of our concern for the integral development of society’s most neglected members.’ In our hearts, we encounter ‘the need to heed this plea, born of the liberating action of grace within each of us, and so it is not a matter of a mission reserved only to a few’” (DT 111).

19. Lack of spiritual care: “Nor is it a question merely of providing for

welfare assistance and working to ensure social justice. Christians should also be aware of another form of inconsistency in the way they treat the poor. In reality, “the worst discrimination which the poor suffer is the lack of spiritual care... Our preferential option for the poor must mainly translate into a privileged and preferential religious care” (DT 114).

20. Almsgiving as encounter: “I would like to close by saying something about almsgiving, which nowadays is not looked upon favorably even among believers. Not only is it rarely practiced, but it is even at times disparaged. Let me state once again that the most important way to help the disadvantaged is to assist them in finding a good job, so that they can lead a more dignified life by developing their abilities and contributing their fair share. In this

sense, ‘lack of work means far more than simply not having a steady source of income. Work is also this, but it is much, much more. By working we become a fuller person, our humanity flourishes, young people become adults only by working [...].’ On the other hand, where this is not possible, we cannot risk abandoning others to the fate of lacking the necessities for a dignified life. Consequently, almsgiving remains, for the time being, a necessary means of contact, encounter and empathy with those less fortunate” (DT 115).
