

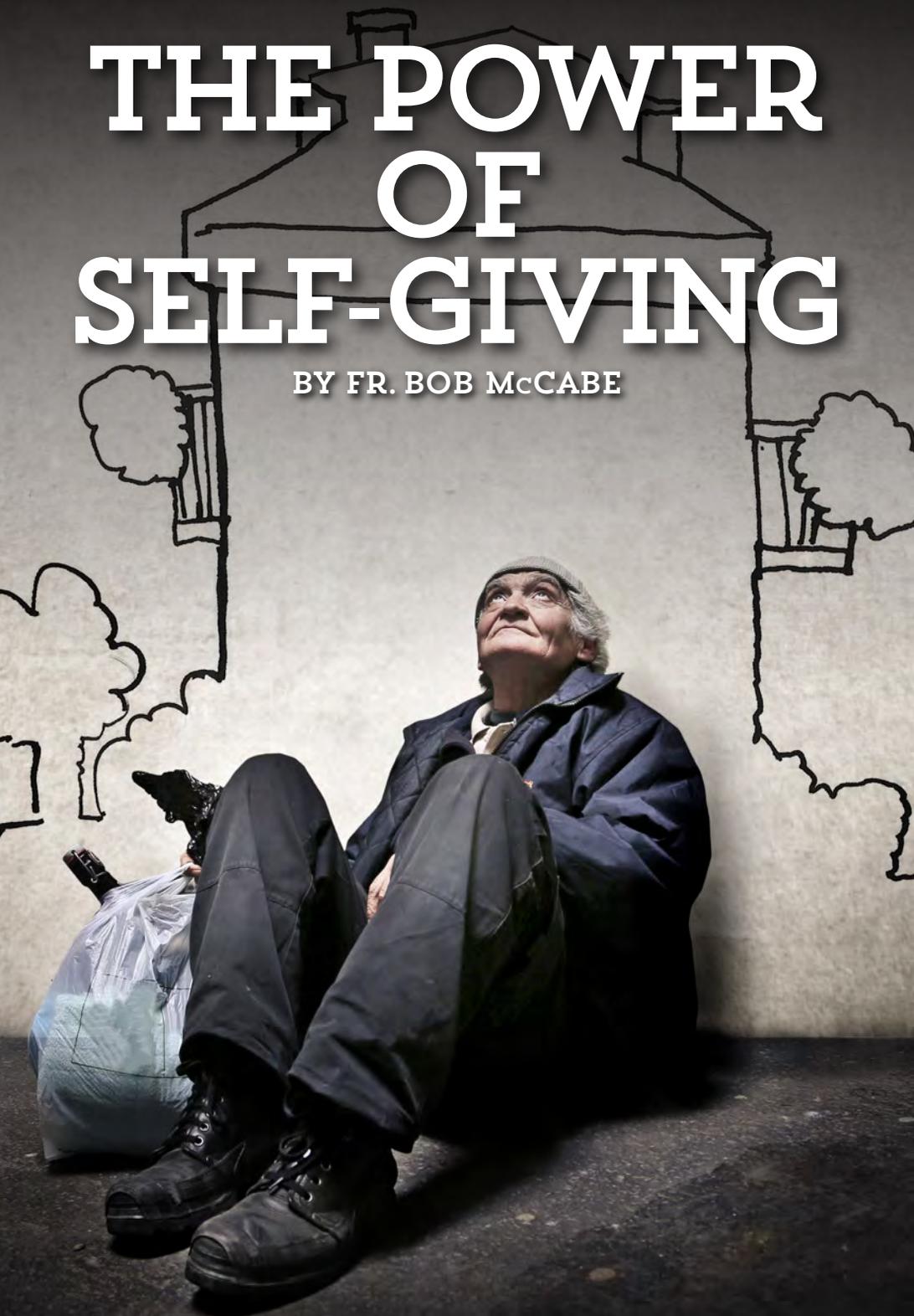
FAITH MATTERS

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THE POWER OF SELF-GIVING

BY FR. BOB McCABE



Which relationships have transformed your life? Relationships are transformative when we see the other person as a child of God, and they see Jesus in us. Our parents, siblings, our spouse, a close friend may come to our mind first, but we need to also consider our relationship with the poor.

Poverty has many faces. Someone can be financially wealthy and poor spiritually, emotionally or physically. Each of us has been called by the Lord to love those who are suffering and wounded. This is clearly stated by the prophet Isaiah when he tells us what is considered fasting in God's eyes:

Is this not, rather, the fasting that I choose: releasing those bound unjustly, untying the thongs of the yoke; Setting free the oppressed, breaking off every yoke? Is it not sharing your bread with the hungry, bringing the afflicted and the homeless into your house; Clothing the naked when you see them, and not turning your back on your own flesh? Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your wound shall quickly be healed; Your vindication shall go before you, and the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer, you shall cry for help, and he will say: "Here I am!" (Isaiah 58: 6-9)

For many years, I have been struck by this promise found in the word of God; clothe the naked, give bread to the hungry, shelter the homeless, "then will your light shine like the

dawn and your wound be quickly healed." What an amazing promise! God heals us on many different levels when we show compassion to those who are poor and suffering.

St. Teresa of Calcutta always saw Jesus, "in the distressing disguise of the poor." If we hope to recognize Jesus in this way, we need to be people of prayer. Prayer is the starting point. By God's grace, we can have our hearts transformed. That is what God wants to do in each of our lives.

I am passionate about photography, and I have been taking pictures in downtown Detroit since I was 18 years old. Over the years, I have asked people who are struggling if I could take their picture in order to raise awareness of the poor and homeless.

We normally converse while I take the photos. People who know me know it takes time and many attempts to get a picture that I really think is good. During those 5, 10 or 15 minutes, a friendly conversation unfolds. Sometimes I ask questions, and they share their stories. They are honest, humble and sincere. Sometimes they tell me the mistakes they have made, their regrets and hopes for a better life. For me, these conversations are transformative. No longer is this just a man or woman on the streets. This is a person made in God's image and likeness. This is a person who has infinite value.

It is always sacred when we take time

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“THE POOR
NEED US,
BUT THE NEED
WE HAVE
FOR THE POOR
IS NO LESS.”

ST. TERESA
OF CALCUTTA



to pray together. This does not happen always, but when it does, it is beautiful and profound. I remember a woman who one winter's day was standing in a doorway to block the wind. She had a blanket wrapped around her. After taking her photo, I asked if I could say a prayer for her. She said yes. Afterwards, I asked if she would say a prayer for me. Again, she said yes. I was not prepared for the powerful prayer that flowed from her heart. It was a glorious prayer. I must admit, I felt like a "rookie" by comparison.

Unless we slow down and take time to reach out to people who are in need, we will not hear their stories. It is important to have the opportunity to tell our stories whether they are joyous or ones of loss and sorrow. When someone shares and the other listens, both are enriched.

St. Vincent de Paul was a great advocate for the poor. He too saw Christ in those who suffered. His words are powerful and challenging for us today. This is what he wrote concerning service to the poor:

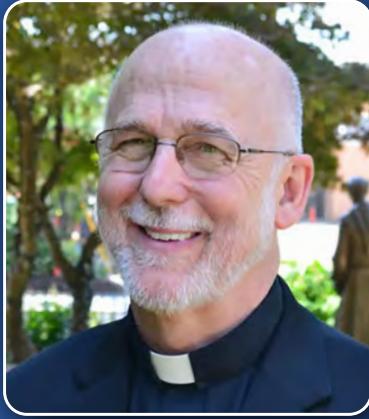
Let us go then, my brothers, and work with a new love in the service of the poor, looking even for the most destitute and abandoned among them. Let us recognize that before God they are our lords and masters and we are unworthy to render them our small services. Let us, my sisters, cherish the poor as our masters, since Our Lord is in them and they in Our Lord.

When we think of all that afflicts the poor, homeless and struggling, we may feel helpless and overwhelmed. Do not be! No one can do everything, but everyone can do something! Make a sandwich and give it to someone you see on the side of the road when you stop at a traffic light. Have an extra pair of gloves in the car and offer it to someone who has none. Pray for that person and ask him or her to pray for you. If you frequently see the same homeless person, remember his or her name. Address that person by name. This affirms the individual's dignity and worth.

Our time on this earth is brief. May we use the gift of our faith and the gift of our time to enrich and be enriched by the people God places in our lives. All of us have so much to give as St. Teresa of Ávila reminds us in this beautiful prayer:

"Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body. Christ has no body now on earth but yours."

Let us pray for one another. May we be advocates and friends for those among us who are poor. Recognizing our own poverty, may we still be a blessing to others. In turn, we will be greatly blessed and transformed.



FR. BOB McCABE

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