

This Sunday's second reading (James 2:1-5) gives a short but significant window into early Christian worship and teaching regarding love of neighbour. James is one of the most explicitly Jewish Christian epistles in the New Testament (like those of Peter, John, and Jude) written to the scattered Jewish Christian believers living throughout the Roman Empire.

James tends to focus more on ethics in the context of high Christology — and in this passage in particular, he's looking at the ethics of how Christians treat one another in their liturgical assemblies. They must show no partiality as they hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. He gives two contrasting examples: If a man with gold rings and in fine clothing comes into your assembly (synagogue) he is treated kindly or honourably by inviting him to take a seat, whereas if a poor person comes in wearing shabby clothing, you say to him: "Stand there," or, "Sit at my feet." So the rich believers get the good seats in the liturgical assembly to hear the Word of God, whereas the poor believers have to stand or to sit on the ground. It seems that there were seats in synagogues and certain people had good seats. Then for those Jews who were Christian, the liturgy of sacrifice would take place elsewhere, depending where one lived.



In either case, James makes it clear that there were seats in early Christian liturgical assemblies and there shouldn't be any distinction between members of the faithful who are coming in by giving seats to the rich people and the floor or the standing room only to the poor because, as he says: it was those who were poor according to the world that God chose, to be rich in faith and to be the heirs to the kingdom which he promised to those who love him. The same admonition applies to us today who are called to be spiritually poor. (CCC 2546, 2547) It is because we know the teachings of Jesus (Bible) and of His Church (Tradition), we are able to love as an inclusive, loving community thereby showing others the path of life. We have nothing to boast about before God.

As Augustine, in his *Confessions*, book 8, ch4, v9 puts it: May it be averted that in Your tabernacle the persons of the rich should be accepted before the poor, or the noble before the ignoble; since rather "You have chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty and base things of the world, and things which are despised, have You chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to naught things that are." <https://bit.ly/3jvuf1F>

In more modern times, since the Industrial Revolution (1760-1850), the Church has been to the fore on social justice issues such as the rights of exploited classes to a just wage. On marking the centenary of Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891), Pope John Paul II stated: "Pope Leo XIII, in the footsteps of his predecessors, created a lasting paradigm for the Church. The Church, in fact, has something to say about specific human situations, both individual and communal, national and international" (*Centesimus Annus* 5). <https://bit.ly/3yEjLBK>

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