Columns
Ministry
Social Justice



Maria Thao and Mary Nguyen Thi Phuong Lan (Nguyen) deliver gifts to those living in poverty. (Provided photo)



by Mary Nguyen Thi Phuong Lan (Nguyen)

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"*Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.*"

—Matthew 25:40

Jesus identifies with and dies for humankind. The disturbing passage of the Gospel reminds Miss Maria Thao, a Vietnamese laywoman who attends daily mass at her Thai Xuan Parish, that she will ultimately be judged by her ability to recognize the Lord's face in the poor and weak. Acting on these Gospel words, she has become intensely determined to do charity for the poor, the homeless, and the elderly people whom she meets. This is in spite of having a paralyzed left foot.

Maria Nguyen Trang Minh Thao is a single 43-year-old woman in the Dong Nai province in Vietnam, a member of the Xuan Loc Diocese, Xuan Loc district. She was paralyzed in her left foot when she was a child; she can walk normally but not very far. But she can earn money to feed herself without receiving any support from anyone except her parents.



Maria Thao makes dried beef to be canned for customers. (Provided photo)

Her job is selling fresh and dried beef. Every morning, she gets up early and obtains beef from the slaughterhouse. Usually, she sells fresh beef in the morning and makes the dried beef in the afternoon. She has a hard work day: aside from selling, she makes daily trips on a three-wheel motorbike to deliver the beef to some

restaurants and customers who order her items via cellphone.

She is famous for her dried beef — many people enjoy it and order it every day, and she delivers it to them. Thanks to these delivery trips, she has met some people in disadvantaged situations. But she has also met a few benefactors and charity groups who would like to help her because of her paralyzed foot.

But she skillfully refuses their gifts by asking them to transfer these gifts to people who have more difficulties and hardships in life than she does. As she explains, "I can get money to feed myself; others have nothing to eat and live." Hearing her honest words, some supporters really admire her, and they are willing to supply food and other needs for those living in poverty whom she has encountered. When she gets gifts from benefactors, she willingly stops selling the beef for a day and distributes the donations she has received.



Mary Thao, center, visits a woman, left. (Provided photo)

By chance, I came back to visit my family, and dropped by her house. At that time, she was preparing gifts for the poor. She invited me to go with her to do her charitable works, saying she needed someone to help hold the gifts while she was driving. So we went to give gifts to the poor, the homeless, the isolated elderly and the paralyzed. After we finished our mission, she drove me to the statue of the Virgin Mary in the parish to pray for both the benefactors and the poor. She told me to ask the Virgin Mary to intercede with God for the benefactors, to grant them success in their works, and to give them a generous heart for the suffering. We prayed for the poor, that they may always be loved by everyone, and that their lives may have fewer difficulties and hardships.

What a meaningful visitation for me! First, I really admire Thao, a woman who is always concerned and makes sacrifices for others. She said, "I feel happy in doing these charitable works. When I aid the disadvantaged persons, it means that I share God's love for them. God loves me too much, giving me a good job, so I can easily earn money to feed myself. That is more luck than others. Thus, helping the poor is my duty."

Secondly, thanks to this visit, I had a good chance to encounter and talk with the poor in order to understand their difficulties and hardships. From then on, I have reminded myself to spend more of my own time to pray with God for the poor in daily prayers. Particularly, I also pray for Thao: May God bless her charitable works, so that she can continue to bring peace and happiness to the poor. As Matthew Chapter 5, Verse 7, said, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall be shown mercy."

[Mary Nguyen Thi Phuong Lan (Nguyen) is a Dominican Missionary Sister of Phu Cuong who has worked in formation programs in Vietnam. She is in charge of caring for 32 orphans at Binh Trieu Development Center in Ho Chi Minh City.]

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