



# Lord, when did we see you hungry

MATTHEW 25:37

## CATECHETICAL SUNDAY 2024

### “PRACTICAL WAYS TO ENCOUNTER CHRIST IN PEOPLE ON THE MARGINS”

**Paul Jarzembowski, Associate Director, USCCB, Laity, Marriage, Family Life, and Youth**

The first step for young adults towards drawing closer to people on the margins is simply acknowledging those peripheries exist and beginning to see the countless women and men whom we may often overlook. As we do this, we discover that the presence of Christ has been there all along. We become overjoyed to see God in more and more places in our world today.

The second step in this journey is crafting an action plan to do something about it. Awareness is excellent, and it becomes truly fruitful when we take steps to encounter Christ in those on the margins.

Italian layman Pier Giorgio Frassati (1901-1925) can serve as an excellent example for young adults today in drawing closer to people on the margins. Born and raised around Turin in the north of Italy to a family of some means, Pier Giorgio had a natural inclination toward charity, especially to those on the margins of his society: the impoverished, the sick, and the suffering around him. Even as a young person, Pier Giorgio sought out the people on the margins, whom others in his social class may have otherwise ignored. Sadly, Pier Giorgio died by contracting polio, likely from someone on the peripheries he was accompanying and supporting.

At his funeral, his family expected the elite and political figures to come out to mourn due to their social status in the community. Instead, they were shocked to find thousands of poor, marginalized, sick, and suffering individuals lining the streets to say farewell. While he was not a renowned teacher or miracle worker in his day, Pier Giorgio was eventually beatified in 1990 and is expected to be canonized a saint in the coming year. His is a story of an “everyday guy” going regularly to the margins, to encounter Christ present in those who inhabit the spaces outside of our normal view.



As a young adult, Pier Giorgio once remarked, “Jesus comes to me every morning in Communion, and I return the visit by going to serve the poor.”<sup>1</sup> This ability to see Christ in those on the margins, then, is possible for each and every one of us, if only we have the confidence to look deeply and act justly.

Here are a few practical action steps that young adults may consider to follow this path:

- **Engaging in service to those in poverty**, ideally having opportunities for face-to-face encounters with members of the human family in need. This can include volunteering at a local shelter or soup kitchen in the community, as well as connecting with the work of Catholic Charities USA (see their list of [local agencies here](#) and [resources nationwide here](#), including support around affordable housing, community gardens, prison ministry, emergency services, domestic violence, immigration, food security, and more) and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul (volunteer in your area by [exploring online here](#)).

In addition, consider ways to address the root causes of poverty by advocating and acting for social justice through your municipality, state, or federal systems. Practical ideas for connecting with advocacy work and justice initiatives can be found through the USCCB [Department of Justice, Peace, and Human Development’s website](#).

- **Get to know other cultural families distinct from your own.** Find ways to worship alongside those of other ethnic groups, races, and cultural communities in your local area. Consider reaching out to a pastor or pastoral leader of a parish with a significant population of Catholics from a cultural family not your own and ask them to accompany you. Attend Mass with the community and be open to their expressions of faith.

Reaching out can be done through the diocesan cultural diversity office (or a similar office such as an Office for Black Catholics, Hispanic Ministry, or Asian-Pacific Islander Ministry) to find out where to look. The diocesan office(s) focused on ministry with young adults may also be able to guide and introduce you to these colleagues.

- **Learn about and support ministries with persons with disabilities in your area.** You may wish to explore the National Catholic Partnership on Disability and their resources online ([which can be found here](#)). You may also inquire with your local parish or diocese about ways that you can become more active in disabilities ministries or opportunities.

In addition, ask your pastor or pastoral leadership about ways to make your church more accessible to those with physical or intellectual/behavioral disabilities – and volunteer to be an advocate among the able-bodied community.

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<sup>1</sup> Pier Giorgio Frassati, quoted in Pope Francis, “Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the Thirty-First World Youth Day, 2016,” [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/youth/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150815\\_messaggio-giovani\\_2016.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/youth/documents/papa-francesco_20150815_messaggio-giovani_2016.html), Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 15 August 2015.

- **During one of the key “moments of return” within the parish**, such as Ash Wednesday, Christmas, or Easter, as well as weddings, baptisms, and funerals, volunteer to help greet visitors and newcomers. In addition, during those liturgies (and at the appropriate time), make an effort to go out of your way to welcome and converse with people unknown to you.

Being attentive to those who are not regular parishioners and occasional visitors by smiling, introducing yourself, and asking to support, assist, or accompany them can go a long way to making people feel seen and appreciated, rather than judged or ignored.

These are just a few simple measures that young adults can take to make visible those who often go unseen. When we take the time to act on our awareness and see Christ in these women and men, our own experience of faith can become more illuminated.

Pier Giorgio once noted, “I see a special light surrounding the poor and unfortunate; a light that we do not have.”<sup>2</sup> This is the light we long to see – a light that Christ radiates especially through those on the margins of our everyday experiences – a light we do not want to miss.

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<sup>2</sup> Pier Giorgio Frassati, quoted in Brandon Vogt, “Charity and Faith: Pier Giorgio Pier Giorgio’s Option for the Poor,” <https://www.wordonfire.org/articles/charity-and-faith-pier-giorgio-frassatis-option-for-the-poor/>, Word on Fire, July 4, 2016.