

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 15

DO YOU SEE THE MOTHER HOLDING HER INFANT?

Did you notice the second infant in the image? Up in the window, in her mother's arms, there is another child.

Much will be the same about these little ones, they will grow, learn to walk and talk. They will be loved. They will be hurt and experience hardship and find wonder and grace in the world. Given what we can see, we know also that much will be different. Jesus is born in a stable, not a fine stone house. His open-air bed is exposed to the elements while the other child slumbers under a sturdy roof. Mary and Joseph will soon move from one place to another, while the other family may remain in their home for the child's entire lifetime. The love and hope that surround both children are the same, but the practical realities of their lives make things very different for them.

We see these similarities and disparities played out in maternity floors across our ministries every day. According to CDC data, Black and Indigenous mothers die at a rate that is 2.5 to 4 times greater than their white counterparts. Most heartbreakingly, 3 in 5 of those pregnancy related deaths are preventable. The implicit racial bias in health care is something we must confront, if we are to truly bring forth God's kingdom on earth. We must always recall that Mary and Jesus were on the margins and at risk. The stable, while graced by God's presence and blessed to be the cradle of Christ, is far from the ideal nursery.

Scripture is a constant reminder that God is especially for those who are poor. God is relentlessly in the corner of the meek and those the



world has trampled over or overlooked. The Gospel today speaks of two brothers, both called by their father to work in the vineyard. One verbally refuses, but does what he is asked in the end. The other verbally agrees, but ultimately ignores his father's wishes. Jesus uses the story to remind his readers that it was actions, not words, that allowed the will of the father to happen.

In Catholic health care we verbally commit ourselves to the care of the poor and vulnerable, to advocate for those in need and to relentlessly meet the unmet needs of those who are marginalized. This Advent we must consider how our deeds align with our words to make the prophecies of the season ring true in our health systems: "Every valley shall be lifted up, every mountain and hill made low; The rugged land shall be a plain, the rough country, a broad valley" (Isaiah 4:40). From where you sit, what can you do to care for Christ as he comes to us through the weak, impoverished, burdened and meek?

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