

What did our Founder, Fr. Jordan actually do? This is a good question. We can think of other founders such as Mother Theresa whom we know ministered directly to the destitute and to the dying in India. But what did Fr. Jordan do? How did he show his dedication to social justice?

The short answer is that our founder, Fr. Jordan, founded. All of his best energies went toward founding his two institutes, the Salvatorian men and women and towards instilling in the young members his spirit of apostolic zeal. He seldom left the formation house in Rome. He almost never offered Mass in public and rarely spoke to groups outside the formation community. Our founder founded. Therefore, to see what role Fr. Jordan played in furthering social justice we do not look to him as much as we look toward the members, his spiritual sons and daughters, to see what they were doing.

There is no better example than the foundation begun in Vienna in 1895. This was not the Vienna of Strauss waltzes and sparkling café culture. It was the hard scrabble life of the working poor, where up to 100,000 people in the district served by Salvatorians, lived as "bed-renters" who paid to sleep in shifts in beds left unoccupied when their owners went off to work. By 1910, 25 Salvatorian men were at work in this poor suburb of Vienna offering catechesis to both children and adults.

One of these men, Fr. Gregory Gasser, arrived in Vienna in 1901. Unsatisfied with merely catechizing the poor, he looked to change the conditions that led to poverty. To address this situation he formed the Austrian Grassroots Association and became a true apostle to the working poor in the area of social justice. Listen to his fiery words:

"If the masses cry out for social reforms today, they demand, in the first place, not only better conditions of life but also...a more significant participation in the growing intellectual and moral areas of the culture. They demand, before all else, to be recognized as adults, that is, to be able to act with equal conditions, together with the political powers and other forces and social classes in the promotion of culture and the enjoyment of its benefits. This is the new face of the social question, in this consists the proof by fire of all truly successful social work.

Such social reform cannot be realized only by those who hold power, or by a legislative corporation, or even through the kind initiatives of those who sympathize with the people and are socially well intentioned. What happens for the people should occur by means of the people themselves. In order for this to happen, however, instruction of the masses is necessary."

Fr. Gregory represents the modern apostle, the priest inserted, body and soul, in the reality of his times. He loved his people; he loved their mistakes and their ideals. Because of this, he dedicated himself, body and soul, to the work of the Grassroots Association. He was one of its most tenacious representatives. He assiduously studied the social problems and, in fact, captured its most characteristic longings. He acted from conviction, not concerned with what was popular or en vogue. He was prepared to take painful sacrifices for the cause... Perhaps this is the way the saints live and work here on earth and because of this, we can also believe that every work he touched with his hands has God's blessing.

No founder can do everything. He cannot be at once a missionary, parish priest, catechist, father to the poor, scholar, preacher and saint. A founder like Fr. Jordan leaves to his sons and daughters the task of realizing his charism in the various places and situations into which they are sent... "That all might know the one true God"