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*Barbara Cartland, a prolific writer of popular romances, came into contact with royal circles when her step-granddaughter, Diana, became Princess of Wales in 1981. When Miss Cartland was interviewed for the BBC radio programme 'Today', the interviewer asked her if she thought that class barriers had broken down in Britain. "Of course they have." replied Miss Cartland, "or I wouldn't be sitting here talking to you."*

We may smile wryly at Miss Cartland's answer but she is not a minority of one. Each of us has grown up with a mixed bag of values and preconceptions, some of which are very good while others may not tally with the gospel – one of which is class prejudice or these days we might call it class-phobia.

Class distinction serves to prop up our sense of superiority over others. What needs to give here is this exaggerated sense of our own importance. We often heard it said: 'you're as young as you feel but seldom as important'. It's the self-effacing who are exalted in the eyes of God. The last shall be first and the first last.

Class segregation can often be taken for granted by people. It's often safer and less complicated to only mix with our own. But Jesus had a wide circle of friends both among the rich and poor, some well-heeled but the majority were marginalized. The gospel tells us that God lets 'his sun shine and his rain fall on bad men as well as good'. The same could apply to the haves and the have-nots. Jesus was neither partial towards the rich nor condescending towards the poor of his day.

People say that there are two Sheffields, one reasonably well off, the other, less so. There may be no walls separating them but there are 'invisible barriers'.

However it would be wrong to pigeon-hole all people in this regard. A spiritually deprived person in the gospel sense is one who is deficient in faith and love whatever their social standing. A rich person gospel-wise is not restricted as to whom they value. They have no exclusion zones regarding people. It doesn't depend on where you live or even the size of your bank account. At the same time an oversized bank balance won't earn you any favours in this regard. The rich young man in the gospel turned down the Lord's invitation to follow him because he was a man of great wealth. He parted company with Jesus a very sad man. But on the other-hand Joseph of Arimathea, who was a man of means, gave Jesus the tomb he'd reserved for himself.

St James says: "Do not try to combine faith in Jesus, our glorified Lord, with the making of distinctions between classes of people." Class prejudice is anti-the-gospel-of love. Do my eyes need to be opened in this regard?

Scripture says that 'man looks at appearances, but the Lord looks at the heart'. Jesus chided the Pharisees for being lovers of money and social recognition. Is there any standoffishness in my life which is preventing me from valuing all people as brothers and sisters in the Lord - whatever their financial standing, background or class.

*Jesus opened the ears of the deaf man in today's gospel. May he open wide our hearts to value everyone as in the same way He did.*