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*Barbara Cartland, a 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 amusingly 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.

Class distinction serves to give us a sense of superiority. 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 unassuming who are exalted in the eyes of God. Our Blessed mother prayed 'the Lord has looked upon His lowly handmaid'.

Class segregation can often be taken for granted by people. It's often safer and less complicated to only mix with our own kind. But Jesus had a wide circle of friends both among the rich and poor, some quite comfortably well off like Simon the Pharisee and the rich young man but the majority were lowly people of modest means. Others were living on the edge of society like the blind beggars, the prostitutes and the lepers. 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 of this world. 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 far less so. There may be no walls separating them, like in Palestine, 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 be they rich or poor materially. It doesn't depend on where you live or even the size of your bank account. Having said that an inflated 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 too tied to his wealth. He walked away from Jesus a rather sad man. But on the other-hand Joseph of Arimathea, who was well-off, gave Jesus the tomb he'd bought for himself. I was reading recently that Lazarus, whom Jesus raised from the dead owned quite a bit of land whereas the other Lazarus who sat begging at the rich man's gate had nothing.

St James says: "Do not try to combine faith in Jesus with the making of distinctions between classes of people." 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 whereas Jesus himself 'had nowhere to lay his head'.

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