

THE WORKS OF MERCY

DON FERDINANDO
COLOMBO

the reEvolution of works of mercy



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INTRODUCTION

"Little children, we must stop expressing love merely by our words and manner of speech; we must love also in action and in truth."

(1 John 3,18)

The Year of Mercy

Pope Francis in the document, "The Face of Mercy" (Mv) exclaims with great passion, "How I long for the years to come to be steeped in mercy so as to reach out to every person bringing the goodness and tenderness of God! May the balm of mercy come to all, believers and distant ones, as a sign of the Kingdom of God already present in our midst.» (Mv 5). This same document helps us retrace Salvation History in the key of Mercy:

"In short, God's mercy is not an abstract idea, but a con-created reality by which He reveals His love like that of a father and mother who are moved to the depths of their bowels for their child. It is truly the case that it is a "visceral" love. (Mv 6)

The mission Jesus received from the Father was to reveal the mystery of divine love in its fullness. "God is love" (1 John 4:8, 16).

His person is nothing but love, a love that gives itself freely. His relationships with the people who approach him manifest something unique and unrepeatable. The signs He performs, especially toward sinners, poor, excluded, sick and suffering people, are under the banner of mercy. Everything in Him speaks of mercy. Nothing in Him is without compassion. What moved Jesus in all circumstances was nothing but mercy, with which He read the hearts of His interlocutors and responded to their truest need. (Mv 8)

Let us listen to the word of Jesus who placed mercy as an ideal of life and as a criterion of credibility for our faith: "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall find mercy" (Mt. 5:7), is the beatitude to be inspired by with particular commitment in this Holy Year.

God's mercy is his responsibility for us. He feels responsible, that is, He desires our good and wants to see us happy, filled with joy and serene. It is on the same wavelength that the merciful love of Christians should be oriented. As He loves the Father so they love their children. As He is merciful, so are we called to be merciful to one another. (Mv 9)

***“Show me your faith without works,
and I with my works will show you my faith....
You fool, will you understand that faith without works is worthless?”***
(James 2,18.20)

The Works of Mercy

In this Holy Year, we will be able to have the experience of opening our hearts to those who live in the most disparate existential peripheries, which the modern world often creates in dramatic ways. How many situations of precariousness and suffering are present in today's world! How many wounds are etched in the flesh of so many who no longer have a voice because their cry has faded and died out because of the indifference of rich peoples. In this Jubilee even more the Church will be called upon to heal these wounds, to soothe them with the oil of consolation, bandage them with mercy and heal them with solidarity and due care. Let us not fall into indifference that humiliates, into habit that anesthetizes the soul and prevents the discovery of newness, into cynicism that destroys.

Let us open our eyes to look at the miseries of the world, the wounds of so many brothers and sisters deprived of dignity, and feel provoked to listen to their cry for help. Let our hands shake their hands, and let us pull them to us so that they feel the warmth of our presence, friendship and fraternity. Let their cry become ours and together we can break the barrier of indifference that often reigns supreme to hide hypocrisy and selfishness.

It is my fervent wish that the Christian people reflect during the Jubilee on the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. It will be a way to awaken our often slumbering conscience before the drama of poverty and to enter more and more into the heart of the Gospel, where the poor are the privileged ones of divine mercy. Jesus' preaching presents us with these works of mercy so that we can understand whether or not we are living as his disciples.

Let us rediscover the corporal works of mercy: giving food to the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, visit the sick, visit the imprisoned, bury the dead. And let us not forget the works of spiritual mercy: counsel the doubtful, instruct the ignorant, admonish sinners, comfort the afflicted, forgive offenses, bear wrongs patiently, and pray to God for the living and the dead.

We cannot escape the words of the Lord: and by them we shall be judged: whether we have given food to the hungry and drink to the thirsty. Whether we shall have welcomed the homeless and clothed the naked. Whether we will have had time to be with those who are sick and prisoners (cf. Mt 25:31-45). Equally, we will be asked whether we have helped to break out of the doubt that causes people to fall into fear and is often a source of loneliness; whether we have been able to overcome the ignorance in which millions of people live, especially children deprived of the help they need to be redeemed from poverty; if we have been close to those who are lonely and afflicted; if we have forgiven those who offend us and rejected all forms of resentment and hatred that lead to violence; if we have been patient following the example of God who is so patient with us; if, finally, we have entrusted our brothers and sisters to the Lord in prayer. In each of these “little ones” Christ himself is present. His flesh becomes visible again as a battered, scourged, scourged, undernourished, fleeing body... to be recognized, touched and cared for by us. Let us not forget the words of St. John of the Cross: “At the evening of life, we shall be judged on love”» (Mv 15).

Prayer from Charles de Foucauld

My Father, I surrender myself to You. Do with me what pleases You. Whatever You make of me, I thank You. I am ready for everything, I accept everything, as long as Your will is done in me and in all Your creatures: I desire nothing else, my God. I place my life in Your hands, I give it to You, my God, with all the love in my heart, because I love You And it is a demand of love for me to give myself And putting myself back into Your hands without measure, with infinite confidence, For You are my Father. Amen.



FEED THE HUNGRY

Each year, nearly 11 million children die before they reach the age of 5; malnutrition accounts for 53 percent of these deaths. In Europe still 79 million people live below the poverty line. An average of 8.7 billion euros is thrown away each year in Italy due to food waste. By now when it comes to food we think only of our gluttonous desires...and advertisements certainly don't help; Buy, eat, buy again.

Nearly 850 million of planet Earth's inhabitants (of the more than 7 billion who inhabit it) are still burdened by chronic hunger (defined as the intake of less than 1,800 kcal per day), while 1.3 billion are in a completely different situation, in conditions of obesity and overweight. (FAO report "The State of Food Insecurity in the World-SOFI 2013").

In the poor countries of the southern hemisphere, the problem is often one of being able to eat something, because the scarcity of food or its hoarding by the few who take it away from the many is a real and manifest fact. People are starving, undernourished from hunger, weak to the point of easily contracting diseases, with no strength in their bodies to fight them: all this is just the epiphanic sign of the injustice of the world, a place where some "feast lavishly every day" (cf. Lk. 16:19), live in splendor, flaunt riches and display their arrogant power.

For us believers in the God who "gives bread to all flesh" (Ps. 136:25), that is, to every living person, this situation of hunger seems unjust and absurd, a true contradiction to the goodness of God who wants life in abundance for all his creatures.

And so we are led to discover that the earth has been given to all; that the table set with the world's goods is for all; that no one can say that something is only "his," depriving the other of it; that riches are distributed unjustly, so that mankind paradoxically has come to suffer because one part of it is obese, while another is starving. (Enzo Bianchi)

Don Benzi wrote:

“There is a difference between service and sharing.

- Service asks for performance, sharing asks for belonging.*
- The poor person you meet is a heart to understand, he is not a stomach to be filled.*
- If you treat him like a hungry stomach into which you throw noodles and roasted meat, one day he will vomit it up.*
- The poor man is a person with wonderful gifts that he carries, with a mission to fulfill.*
- The poor man waits for your hand before you throw on him a used dress.*
- If you treat him like a mannequin on which you throw more or less worn-out clothes, he will one day throw them at you violently, rejecting your person.*
- He wants you to ask his forgiveness because you have everything: he has been robbed of everything by that society that has given you so much that you allow yourself to give crumbs to him, wounding him in his dignity, humiliating him.*
- Stop with the homeless man along the streets: talk to him before you open your wallet.*
- Get into dialogue with the window cleaner, don't see him as a nuisance, talk to him in his humiliation and he will understand.”*

Says the **Catechism of the Catholic Church** (number 2463): In the multitude of human beings without bread, without shelter, without a fixed abode, how can we not recognize Lazarus, the hungry beggar of the parable? How not to resent Jesus: «You did it to me; did you not do it to me?» (Mt 25)

The apostle **James** says: «If a brother or sister is unclothed and without daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and satiated", but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is that? So also faith: if it is not followed by works, in itself it is dead» (Jas. 2:15-16).

Let us remember **Jesus** when He says: “Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God...” (Mt.4:4) When a Christian gives food to the hungry, he is not working in his own name but in the Name of Him who is infinite Mercy, who feeds the hungry with daily bread and who made Himself Food in the Eucharist, Bread of eternal life, nourishment by excellence. We say this in the Lord's Prayer, “give us this day our daily bread....”.

An infinitely more important and necessary food: Jesus Christ Himself! «I am the Bread of Life. ... I am the living Bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread he will live forever, and the bread that I will give is My flesh, for the life of the world» (Jn. 6:48-51).

SEND ME SOMEONE TO LOVE

by Mother Teresa of Calcutta

*Lord, when I am hungry, give me someone who needs food,
 when I have sorrow, offer me someone to console;
 when my cross becomes heavy, let me share another's cross; when I am
 humbled, give me someone to praise;
 when I am discouraged, send me someone to encourage;
 when I need the understanding of others,
 give me someone who needs mine;
 when I need to be taken care of,
 send me someone to take care of;
 when I think only of myself,
 draw my attention to another person.
 Make us worthy, Lord, to serve our brothers and sisters
 who throughout the world live and die poor and hungry.*





GIVE DRINK TO THE THIRSTY

800 million people do not have a faucet in their homes, and according to estimates by WHO, the World Health Organization, more than 200 million children die each year as a result of consuming unhealthy water and the resulting poor sanitary conditions. Overall, it is estimated that 80 percent of diseases in countries of the Global South are due to poor water quality. Worldwide, 1.4 billion people on the planet lack access to clean water. A North American citizen uses 1,700 cubic meters of water per year; the average in Africa is 250 cubic meters per year. The World Water Commission indicates 40 liters per person per day as the minimum amount to meet essential needs. With about 40 liters we Italians take a shower; for others it represents the water of entire weeks. Italy is first in Europe for water consumption and third in the world with 1,200 cubic meters of consumption per year per capita. More than us only the United States and Canada. Compared to European parameters, however, we cannot but pass for wasteful: Italians consume almost 8 times the water used in Britain, 10 times that used by the Danes, and three times what they consume in Ireland or Sweden.

Water has become the blue gold

While the water crisis is linked to multiple factors (increasing world population, increasing need for water for industrial, civil and agricultural uses, pollution of waterways and aquifers, climate change...), it requires policies inspired by cultural and human values of solidarity, not merely economic ones. The transition of water from a right to a commodity is one of the main reasons for injustice.

Pope Francis

«A particularly serious problem is that of the quality of water dispensed to the poor, which causes many deaths every day. Water-related diseases, including those caused by micro-organisms and chemicals, are common among the poor. Dysentery and cholera, due to inadequate sanitation and water supplies, are a significant factor in

suffering and infant mortality». (Laudato si, 29)

«Access to safe and potable water is an essential, fundamental and universal human right, because it determines people's survival, and therefore is a condition for the exercise of other human rights». (Lauds 30)

«The control of water by large global corporations can be expected to become a major source of conflict in this century». (Lauds, 31)

Beverage is life. Just as any kind of plant existence needs water, so even more does a human being need it. It is more terrible to die of thirst than to die of hunger! From the very first moment of its existence, the creature needs nourishment. The newborn immediately seeks the mother's breast; but even before birth the mother nourishes it, so that the fetus can develop and grow, until it becomes-somehow-autonomous. In human life, eating and drinking are necessary, indispensable: not once in a while but always, every day, from birth to death!

As early as 1994 **John Paul II**, at World Food Day emphasized the need to "...consider the importance of water for the life and livelihood of individuals and communities. Since everyone must have access to uncontaminated water supplies, the international community is called to cooperate in protecting this precious resource from inappropriate forms of use and its irrational waste. Without the inspiration that comes from moral principles deeply rooted in the hearts and consciences of men, the agreements and harmony that should exist internationally for the preservation and use of this essential resource will be difficult to maintain and carry forward." All this can only lead to an awareness of the seriousness of the problem and to work at the political level to respond adequately to the desperate demand of those who ask for a drink. Otherwise the words "I was thirsty and you gave me no drink" (Mt 25:42) will judge and surprise even us.

A **Samaritan** woman came to draw water. Jesus said to her, «Give me a drink». Thus begins a dialogue during which the woman does not draw water and Jesus does not drink it, but both show that the true water that can satiate is encounter and that true thirst is the desire for relationship.

And Jesus, promising the water of the Spirit and revelation, promises the water that quenches thirst for eternal life. Jesus answered her, «Whosoever drinks of this water shall thirst again; but whosoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst again; nay, the water that I shall give him shall become in him a fountain of water springing up into eternal life» (Jn. 4:3-42).

There is a statement of Jesus, reported only by John: “He who thirsts, let him come to me, and let him drink who believes in me; as the Scripture says, ‘rivers of living water will flow from his bosom.’ This he said, referring to the Spirit that believers in him would receive” (Jn 7:37-38).

Jesus says, “Whoever shall have given even a cup of fresh water to one of these little ones, because he is my disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward” (Mt.10:42).

And let us not forget that sorrowful cry of Jesus on the Cross, “I thirst!” which encompasses all the needs of suffering people, but also and primarily the suffering of God toward people who are lost. Yes, the Saints say, Jesus thirsts for us, He thirsts for people who are in danger of being lost, and His cry from the Cross seeks people to help Him quench this thirst by becoming His disciples to bring as many people as possible to Him. (Luciano Manicardi)

PRAYER

*Thanks be to you, oh God our Father,
 Who in our Sister Water, your creature,
 Thou hast opened to us the womb of life;
 thanks to you, for the wave that irrigates, the washing that purifies,
 the drink that quenches, the fountain of our rebirth Christ your
 Son. Grant, oh Lord, that every man may always enjoy this
 refreshment and preserving clear and chaste the work of creation,
 see in it the reverberation of your goodness
 and a constant invitation to purity of body and soul.
 Through Christ our Lord.
 Amen*



CLOTHE THE NAKED

Nowadays, it's obvious, we only think about how to dress. And if we don't have that pair of Nike or Adidas shoes, we pout. Buying and buying clothes that after a couple of months have become out of fashion! While there are people who, in their need, if they have a pair of rags to wear have a full wardrobe!

"If one undresses the clothed, he is called a thief. And he who does not clothe the naked when he can do so, does he deserve any other name? The bread that you keep for yourself is of the hungry; the cloak that you keep in the wardrobe is of the naked; the shoes that rot in your house are of the barefoot; the silver that you keep underground is of the needy."

St. Basil the Great (330 A.D)

Particularly incisive is the admonition of **St. John Chrysostom**: «Do you want to honor the body of Christ? Do not neglect him when he lies naked. Do not honor him here in the temple with silken cloths, and then neglect him outside, where he suffers cold and nakedness.»

The human act of clothing those who are naked is based for the **Bible** on the original act of God himself who covered human nakedness by preparing clothing and then clothing Adam and Eve after their transgression: "The Lord God made man and woman tunics of skins and clothed them" (Gen. 3:21). Man's transgression in the garden of inprinciple caused humans to step out of the space of communion and realize their "nakedness," that is, their limited and fragile creaturely condition, that they began to feel mistrust and fear of each other, that otherness began to be experienced as a threat.

This is how Adam and Eve "plaited fig leaves and made themselves belts out of them" (Gen 3:7). But it will only be at the moment when God himself makes tunics of skins and clothes them (cf. Gen 3:21) that they will see their dignity reinstated, see their frailty wrapped in divine mercy, their limitations protected and covered.

Sharing clothes with the poor man is a gesture of intimacy that requires delicacy, discretion and tenderness, because it has to do in a direct way with the body of the other, with its uniqueness that is crystallized to the highest degree in the face, which remains naked, uncovered, and which with its vulnerability reminds us of the fragility of the whole body, of the whole human person, and refers back to it.

Sharing clothes with the poor—not in the impersonal and efficient way of collecting aid to send to the third world poor, but in the face-to-face encounter with the poor—becomes then a concrete narrative of charity, a celebration of gratuitousness, an exchange in which the one who is deprived of something is not impoverished but enriched by the joy of the encounter, and the one who benefits from the gift is not humiliated because being clothed introduces him into a relationship and he feels welcomed in his need as a person, that is, in his uniqueness, not as an anonymous recipient of a shipment of clothes discarded by the rich.

In the Western Christian tradition, the gesture of clothing the naked is most famously expressed by the episode in which **Martin of Tours** cuts off his own cloak to share it with a poor man defenseless against the rigors of a freezing winter. Venantius Fortunatus writes in his Life of St. Martin of Tours, “To a poor man whom he met at the gate of Amiens, and who had turned to him, Martin divides the shelter of his chlamys into equal parts, and with fervent faith puts it on his shivering limbs. The one takes a share of the cold, the other takes a share of the warmth, between both poor people warmth and cold is divided, cold and warmth become a new object of exchange and one poverty is sufficient divided to two people.”

At the end of the fourth century in the Syriac area, the development of the **baptismal rite** included the act by which the neophyte (or the) stripped of his clothes and stepped on them; the anointing of his naked body; the immersion (again in total nudity) in the baptismal waters; and finally the act by which, having risen from the pool, the newly baptized was clothed in a white garment.

The glorious nakedness of the dead (and on the cross the condemned man was in total nakedness to signify his unworthiness) and risen Christ clothes and protects the newly baptized person who now knows himself immersed in a new life having “clothed Christ”: “Baptized into Christ, you have clothed Christ” (Gal 3:27). Clothed in Christ, in baptism,

starting from the nakedness of their own limited and fragile human condition, Christians know themselves to be immersed in God's mercy (Tt 2:4-5), covered and enveloped by it, so that their practice of charity toward those who are in nakedness and shame, helplessness and misery, humiliation and deprivation of dignity, will only be a reflection and testimony of divine mercy. (Luciano Manicardi)

«Even for clothes, why do you worry so much? Look at how the flowers of the fields grow: they don't work, they don't make clothes... yet I assure you that not even Solomon, with all his wealth, ever had such a beautiful dress! So if God makes the flowers of the fields so beautiful today and the next day they are burned, all the more reason He will provide clothing for you, people of little faith! Therefore, do not stand worrying too much, saying, "What shall we eat?, what shall we drink?, how shall we dress?" It is the others, those who do not know God, who are always looking for all these things. Your Father in heaven knows that you need all these things. You, on the other hand, seek the kingdom of God and do his will; everything else God will give you in addition». (Mt 6,28-33)

PRAYER

by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger

*Lord Jesus, you have been stripped of your garments,
exposed to dishonor, expelled from society.*

You took upon yourself the dishonor of Adam, healing him.

*You have clothed yourself with the sufferings and needs of the poor,
those who are expelled from the world.*

But in this very way you give meaning to what appears meaningless.

*Just so you make us recognize that your Father
holds you, us and the world in his hands.*

*Give us a deep respect for man in all stages of his existence and in all
situations in which we encounter him.*

Give us the robe of light of your grace.



HOST THE PILGRIMS

Migrants, fugees, economic migrants, refugees.

The phenomenon we are witnessing is like a tidal wave, uncontrollable, starting from the South and East Mediterranean and crashing on European shores. There are those who advocate the need to erect walls and barbed wires, hiding behind economic alarmism and unfounded phobias. Those, on the other hand, work to welcome more human beings. The ruling classes, of course, it would come to be said, appear to be not very united on the issue. Citizens, generalizing, are divided into two opposing factions. This drama will occupy the rest of our lives. It must therefore be handled, with special urgency and care. But without deluding ourselves that we will solve it by force. If we tried to do so, we would make it unmanageable. We would achieve to multiply casualties, not reduce them. There are no military shortcuts - naval, air or land blockades.

(Lucio Caracciolo)

The drama of refugees

«The dramatic situation of refugees, marked by fear hardship and uncertainty is a sad reality. Refugees every day flee hunger and war in search of a dignified life for themselves and their families. They go to distant lands and when they find work they do not always encounter true welcome, respect and appreciation for the values they hold. Their legitimate expectations clash with complex situations and difficulties that sometimes seem insurmountable, so we think of the drama of refugees who are victims of rejection and exploitation, victims of human trafficking and slave labor»

(Pope Francis).

The poor, the homeless, the wanderer, the stranger, the bum, the one whose humanity is humbled by the burden of lack and deprivation, of rejection and abandonment, of disinterest and estrangement, begins to be welcomed when I begin to feel his humiliation as mine, his shame as mine, when I begin to feel that the mortification of his humanity is my own mortification.

Then, without useless guilt and without hypocritical good feelings, the relationship of hospitality that leads me to do everything within my possibilities for the other person can begin.

But it must be clear, first of all, that **hospitality humanizes** the one who exercises it because as Pierangelo Sequeri says, “he has not yet begun to be a true man who has not experienced pity for the wounded and debased humanity in the other.” (Trento Lungaretti)

One does not have to be a believer or even a Catholic to feel admiration for a man who kneels before other men and **washes their feet**. Pope Francis decided, again this year, to counter the sad “spirit of the times” and go to the reception center for asylum seekers in Castelnuovo di Porto, Rome. Here are “hosted” more than 900 people who have fled wars, terrorism, torture.

Many of them have a different skin color, pray to a different God, and the majority belong to the Muslim community. Those feet to be washed represent the geography of despair, social exclusion, the erasure of all rights and hope for the future. Francis' “radicality” lies precisely in having chosen this place and these feet and to have done so while all around resound the winds of war, terror, and racism. (Beppe Giulietti)

In Jesus, God came to ask men for hospitality

Therefore he posits as a characteristic virtue of the believer the disposition to welcome the other in love. He wanted to be born into a family that did not find lodging in Bethlehem (cf. Lk. 2:7) and experienced exile in Egypt (cf. Mt 2:14). Jesus, who “had nowhere to lay his head” (Mt 8:20), asked for hospitality from those he met. By sending his disciples on mission, he makes hospitality, which they will benefit from, a gesture that concerns him personally: “Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me” (Mt 10:40). The Church reiterates that sympathetic welcome to those in distress is a hallmark of the faith. (John Paul II 1999)

We have long since become a multicultural society. Of course, there are also problems in understanding and integrating foreigners. And there are limitations in a society in welcoming foreigners. Yet, as Christians, we must ask ourselves to what extent today, we respond to Jesus' exhortation about hospitality

and what Christ would tell us today. The Word of Jesus is a constant challenge for us, and we must not eliminate it immediately with rationality. It is a goad that must be present in all our discussions about integrating and welcoming foreigners into our society.

We must not just wait for politics and saddle it with the task of integration. (F. Adolfo Antonelli)

The parable par excellence that proposes to us the model of welcome and hospitality is the parable of the **Good Samaritan** (Lk 10:29-37): a stranger, socially discriminated against, rescues a man - potentially an enemy - a victim of an attack, heals him and brings him to shelter in an inn, where he receives welcome and refreshment. To welcome means to give a place to the other in one's land, in one's life, in one's mind, in one's heart; it means to give him "right of asylum," to care for him, his need to feel alive, loved and protected. After all, a man without a home is a man seeking "family." Not only does Jesus make himself the neighbor of those who are considered strangers and foreigners, but he himself is the Guest of our story. That is, of our life. His story on earth is all a journey: he comes from the bosom of the Father (Lk 1:34-38) and in the stages of his earthly journey he points everyone to the homeland to which we are destined.

That is why he calls us to follow him. And when he states that his own are in the world but are not of the world (Jn17) he calls man back to his ultimate essence, to his being a pilgrim on this earth. Pilgrim is the human being in his journey through life and death, heading toward the Other and toward himself, to rediscover his most genuine humanity. (+Bruno Forte)

PRAYER

God, merciful Father, who has revealed to us Your infinite love in Your Son Jesus Christ, made man for us, grant us to experience Your mercy so deeply that we ourselves may become witnesses and agents of mercy for all those to whom You send us and entrust us. And may Mary, mother of mercy, intercede for us, to help us to live the works of mercy with faith and generous hearts, docile to the action of the Holy Spirit, breath of eternal Love. Amen.

+ Bruno Forte Archbishop of Chieti-Vasto



VISIT THE SICK

Among the seven works of corporal mercy, “visiting the sick” takes on a very special significance, since making oneself close to those who suffer represents a profound and emblematic way of approaching - in Pope Francis' expression- the living and aching flesh of Christ Jesus.

The immediate Gospel reference goes to the parable of the “**Good Samaritan**” (Lk 10:25-37), an icon of Jesus, who took upon himself our infirmities redeeming us from sin, death and their consequences, of which suffering in all its forms – in the biblical reading are the sign. An icon of Jesus and at the same time – like the other works of mercy – a credible sign of incarnation and discernment about the authenticity of personal profession of faith in the Risen Crucified One and love of God and neighbor, especially the weak, poor, and suffering (1 John 3:23-24).

More, in visiting the sick according to the heart of Christ Jesus, He assimilates us to Him and, like Him, girds our aprons in serving the suffering people. It assimilates us to Him as “Christus medicus” of souls and bodies.

A man was coming down from Jerusalem toward Jericho when he encountered highwaymen. They took everything from him, clubbed him, and then went away, leaving him half dead. By chance a priest passed by; he saw the wounded man, passed across the road and went on. A Levite from the Temple also passed by that way; he saw him, shunned him, and went on. Instead, a man from Samaria, who was traveling, passed by him, saw him and had compassion on him. He went near him, poured oil and wine on his wounds and bandaged them. Then she loaded him on her donkey, took him to an inn and did all she could to help him. The next day he took out two silver coins, gave them to the innkeeper and said, “Take care of him, and if you spend more I will pay when I return.”

In the dialogue between Jesus and the doctor of the law, both agree that love for God and neighbor is the necessary condition for inheriting eternal life. The issue becomes more delicate when it comes to deciding

“who is my neighbor”. And to explain this, Jesus tells the parable. He sees, he stops, he feels compassion. That is, he feels involved. Compassion, then, not as mere emotion, but an action that produces care for the other. Jesus therefore invites the doctor of the law – and us today – to enter into the logic of the parable. To act like the Samaritan. To ask himself not so much “who is my neighbor” (as if I can choose who to help), but **“to whom should I be neighbor”** (and thus to everyone, starting with those around me). That good Samaritan is Jesus. He is the One who passing along the path of history noticed how badly off humanity was. He approached us to the point of becoming one of us, Man. He took upon His shoulders our lives, so battered because of sin. He took care. And starting with Jesus, each of us is called today to “do likewise.” Each Christian Community is called “to do the same.” If only because Jesus did it for us: “We love because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19). To love our neighbor is to love God Himself. (Parish of St. Mary of the Assumption-Bibione)

The expression “to visit the sick,” then, carries at least three further meanings. First, the verb “to visit” refers to concretely making oneself **present to the other**, not in words, but in deeds, even and especially when it costs sacrifice, considering what Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta – a favorite icon of Pope Bergoglio's in the Jubilee Year of Mercy – affirmed regarding every gesture of charity toward one's neighbor that, if it does not cost money, risks being worth very little in God's eyes.

Secondly, “visit” also speaks of a non-episodicity of mercy, in the sense that it does not stop at the single charitable act but seeks, in all possible ways, **continuity, systematicity**, organization, as the parable mentioned earlier shows. In fact, not only does the Good Samaritan provide the first care, but he also takes charge of the unfortunate sufferer by transporting him to a place where he can be cared for, paying out of his own pocket, committing himself to continue to be present.

Lastly: visiting means **creativity in operation**: presence, touch, speech, gaze, prayer. Finally, the term “infirm” implies at least two aspects. The first: infirmity is not only limited to the physical, but also the psychological, spiritual, moral. Indeed, the levels often intersect requiring a “holistic” (= comprehensive - ed.) approach according to a discernment that leads to identifying the most appropriate ways to come to the aid of

that particular person offering. The second aspect: the sick person is an image of the *Christus patiens* (suffering Christ), whatever the social and economic class, nationality, religious faith, worldview. Ultimately, then, “visiting the sick” unveils itself as a confirmation of Christian realism, which looks at the reality of man in his entirety and wholeness as an eminent value, in a key that moving from the immanence of the human condition and of pain and suffering turns its gaze toward the transcendent origin and fulfillment of man. (Dario Sacchini)

Benedict XVI who in *“Spe salvi”* (nos. 35-40) presents acting and suffering as places of learning hope whereby suffering accepted and offered is a miracle of love says: “I would like to add one more little note not entirely irrelevant to everyday events. It was part of a form of devotion, the thought of being able to “offer up” the little labors of everyday life, which always strike us again and again as more or less annoying pokes, thus giving them meaning. What does it mean to “offer”? These people were convinced that they could include in Christ's great pity their little labors, which thus somehow became part of the treasure trove of compassion that humankind needs. Perhaps we really should ask ourselves whether such a thing might not become a sensible prospect for us as well” (40).

Isn't suffering accepted and offered, sharing sincerely and freely, miracles of love? (Fr. Gino Oliosi)

PRAYER

*Oh Christ, doctor of bodies and souls
 Watch over our infirm and suffering brother;
 and, like the Good Samaritan, pour upon his wounds
 the oil of consolation and the wine of hope.
 By the healing grace of your Spirit
 illumine the difficult experience of sickness and pain,
 that he may be lifted up in body and soul
 May he join us all in thanksgiving
 To the Father of mercies.
 Thou livest and reignest for ever and ever.*



VISIT THE IMPRISONED

If the story of man's violence, an evil so deep, so real, starts with Cain, it ends at the Cross. To triumph there is nothing but the death of God. And if Jesus dies, he chooses to do so between two criminals. One comes out divinely, goes from defeat to absolute victory, first saved by Christ's death. The other will persist in his rejection of the offered grace. To understand the work of mercy toward the prisoners, we must start from that teaching of Jesus when he tells of the prayer of the publican and the Pharisee (Lk.18:9-14).

Once there were two men: one was a Pharisee and the other was a tax collector. One day they went up to the Temple to pray. The Pharisee stood and prayed like this to himself, "Oh God, I thank you that I am not like other men: thieves, cheaters, adulterers. I am different even from that tax agent. I fast twice a week and offer to the Temple the tenth part of what I earn."

The tax agent, on the other hand, stood back and did not even want to look up to heaven. In fact he beat his chest saying, "Oh God, have mercy on me who am a poor sinner!" I assure you that the tax collector went home forgiven; the other did not. For, he who exalts himself will be brought low; he who lowers himself will be lifted up.

The parable begins by highlighting the fact that "being righteous" is never a native condition of the human person; in fact, the Christian is never righteous before God. The overconfidence of one's innocence, especially when it has as its practical implication a judgmental and intolerant attitude toward one's neighbor and his or her mistakes, is something that should make one think. The Christian is not configured as a "righteous" man, but as a man reconciled, forgiven, justified by God. That is why this parable shows this "picture" between two models: the man who defends his personal righteousness, which God does not validate, and the man who surrenders before God's mercy and is justified.

The case: **Story of Jacques Fesch**

The prison world is, by its very nature, grim; and yet evil, both physical and moral, can become an opportunity for a serious rethinking of life. This has been the case for many. I think of the story of Jacques Fesch, a young thief and murderer of our times, born in 1930 and ending up on the guillotine on October 1, 1957, for killing a police officer in Paris. Jaques, in solitary confinement, was able to take a long examination of his life and little by little rediscovered his faith. He read a lot, especially the Gospels, until he came across the young Carmelite Thérèse de Lisieux, who was his spiritual guide until the day of his execution. He wrote very tender letters to his companion Pierrette, by whom he had a daughter, Veronique, and whom he married a few days before his death. During the years of his trial he had the opportunity to meet Christ, who in the solitude of the cell could speak perhaps more clearly than elsewhere: "You too have been taken there where you would not have wanted to go," he wrote in his diary, thinking of Jesus. At the feet of the Crucified One he learned, as he wrote, "to accept the cross, which little by little will become light; to offer one's suffering and the injustices of which one is the victim; to love those who lash us. And so one day I will hear myself say like the good thief crucified "Truly I tell you, this very day you will be with me in paradise."

"Grace has visited me, — he concluded—, and a great joy has taken hold of me, and above all a great peace.... It is the first time that I cry tears of joy, having the certainty that God has forgiven me." On the last night of her life, the night between Sept. 30 and Oct. 1, 1957, she wrote her baby a most moving letter "for when she is a woman": "You are so beautiful, Veronique!" Then came her earthly end, welcomed with peace: "Last day of struggle: tomorrow at this time I will be in heaven! I trust in the love of Jesus and I know that he will commission his angels to take me on their hands." The guillotine that severed his head actually freed him as one frees a butterfly from its chrysalis. Now there is even talk of a beatification process for him. With God, one can even turn the solitary confinement cell into a small church, a misguided existence into a path of holiness, a guillotine blade into a halo of light!

The Witness: **Don Giuseppe Cafasso (1811-1860)**

Don Bosco's confessor, Don Cafasso devoted himself to the least and to the imprisoned. Pope Benedict said of him «He knew moral theology, but he knew equally well the situations and hearts of the people, whose good he took upon himself, like the good shepherd. Those who had the

grace to be close to him were transformed by it into as many good pastors and good confessors. He clearly indicated to all priests the holiness to be attained precisely in pastoral ministry.» He was a frequent visitor to the Senatorial prisons, so much so that he stayed there until late at night, sometimes all night. He brought cigars and snuff, instead of the lime that the inmates scraped off the walls; but above all he brought thieves and heinous murderers to conversion. They were slow and tormented repentances; at other times, however, they were immediate conversions, occurring even moments before hanging. Pope Benedict XVI said of him again, «From his chair of moral theology he educated to be good confessors and spiritual directors, concerned for the true spiritual good of the person, animated by great balance in making people feel God's mercy and, at the same time, a keen and vivid sense of sin».

Brothers, sisters of the prison: jubilee, which makes us encounter a Father who forgives and consoles, can work miracles for everyone and with everyone. “Even the time spent in prison – the Pope writes,– is God's time and should be lived as such. It is a time that must be offered to God as an occasion of truth, humility, atonement and faith. The Jubilee experience, even if in prison, can lead to unhoped-for human and spiritual horizons.” (Card. Gualtiero Bassetti, Archbishop of Perugia)

PRAYER of Paul VI

*You are necessary to us, Oh our Redeemer,
To discover our misery and to heal it;
to have the concept of good and evil and the hope of holiness;
to deplore our sins,
especially when the victims are children,
and to have their forgiveness.*

*You are necessary to us, Oh great patient of our sorrows,
to know the meaning of suffering, exploitation, violence, and to give it
a value of atonement and redemption.*

*You are needed by us, Oh Christ, Oh Lord, Oh God with us,
to walk in the joy and strength of your charity,
until the final meeting with you beloved, with you awaited,
with you blessed for ever and ever. Amen.*



BURY THE DEAD

Even this last work of corporal mercy is not as simple and obvious as one would be tempted to think. Victims of hatreds and wars le guerre, countless human beings remain on the earth as corpses. Perhaps, we are not even moved. Interventions respond more to hygienic or medical concerns than to motives of compassion. In any case, I have the impression that the surest event of our lives, its conclusion, is sailing in bad waters in our days, stripped of the mystery and seriousness that is its due. In fact, the attitude toward **“our sister death”** — as St. Francis called it — today is one of tremendous fear. The very idea is removed. It is not talked about. We say, impersonally, that “we die,” but we do not seriously consider that one day or another we too will die. It is a problem for others.

(Valentino Salvoldi)

«A silent slaughter continues in the Mediterranean, with deaths more than doubling in 2015 compared to 2014: from 1,600 to over 3,200. The deaths of children continue, forgotten: more than 700 since the beginning of the year». This is what the Director General of the Migrants Foundation, Monsignor Gian Carlo Perego, denounces. But let us leave the word to **Pope Francis**:

Who is responsible? Everyone and no one!

«Even today this question emerges forcefully: Who is responsible for the blood of these brothers and sisters? No one! We all answer like this: it is not me, I have nothing to do with it, it will be others, certainly not me. But God asks each of us, “Where is the blood of your brother that cries out to me?” Today no one in the world feels responsible for this; we have lost the sense of fraternal responsibility; we have fallen into the hypocritical attitude of the priest and the altar server, which Jesus talked about in the parable of the Good Samaritan: we look at our half-dead brother on the side of the road, maybe we think “poor guy,” and we continue on our way, it's not our job; and with that we reassure ourselves, we feel okay. The culture of affluence, which leads us to

think of ourselves, makes us insensitive to the cries of others, makes us live in soap bubbles, which are beautiful, but they are nothing, they are the illusion of the futile, the temporary, which leads to indifference to others, indeed it leads to the globalization of indifference. In this world of globalization we have fallen into the globalization of indifference. We have become accustomed to the suffering of the other, it does not concern us, it is none of our business!

Adam where are you? Cain, where is your brother?

These are the two questions that God asks at the beginning of human history and also asks all people of our time, including us. But I would like us to ask a third question, «Who among us has wept for this fact and for facts like it? Who has wept for the death of these brothers and sisters? Who wept for these people who were on the boat? For the young mothers who were carrying their children? For these men who wished for something to support their families? We are a society that has forgotten the experience of weeping, of "suffering with": the globalization of indifference has taken away our ability to weep!» Herod sowed death to defend his own well-being, his own his own soap bubble. And this continues to repeat itself... We ask the Lord to erase what is left of Herod even in our hearts; let us ask the Lord for the grace to weep over our indifference, to weep over the cruelty in the world, in us, even in those who in anonymity make socio-economic decisions that open the way to dramas like this one. «Who has cried?» Who has cried today in the world?» (From Pope Francis' homily in Lampedusa, July 8, 2013)

You will not have my hatred

Love is stronger than hatred. And life stronger than death. This is understood once again by reading the poignant post written on her Facebook page by Antonie Leiris, the partner of one of the 89 victims of the Bataclan theater in Paris. «Friday night you stole the life of an exceptional person, the love of my life, the mother of my child, yet you will not have my hatred. I don't know who you are and I don't even want to know. You are dead souls. If this God for whom you blindly kill made us in his image, every bullet in my wife's body will have been a wound in her heart. Therefore, I will not I will give you the gift of hating you. It would be to yield to the same ignorance that made you what you

are. You would like me to be afraid, to look at my fellow citizens with distrust, to sacrifice my freedom for security. But yours is a losing battle. I saw it this morning. Finally, after nights and days of waiting. She was as beautiful as when she came out Friday night, as beautiful as when I fell madly in love with her more than 12 years ago. Obviously devastated with grief, I grant you this small victory, but it it will be short-lived. I know that she will accompany our days and that we will meet again in that paradise of free souls that you will never enter. There are two of us left, my son and I, but we are stronger than all the armies in the world. I have no more time for you, I must go to Melvil who is waking up from his nap. He is just 17 months old and he will have a snack like every day and then we will play together, like every day, and all his life this "petit garçon" will give you the affront of being free and happy. Because no, you will never even have his hate». (Massimo Gramellini)

This seventh meditation concludes the works of corporal mercy

We can sum them up by saying that they are the works of charity, the first of which is to purify our love, that is, to truly love. Without forgetting that true love is translated into concrete gestures: we are called to remember that we are love and that, by loving, we are transformed into Love. That is why death will not have the last word on us. A grave is too small to contain our love. We will rise again.

PRAYER by Sister Anna Maria Canopi

*Stay with us, Lord Jesus,
 For without you our path would sink into the darkness of night.
 Stay with us, Lord Jesus,
 To lead us on the paths of the hope that does not die
 And nourish us with the bread of the strong that is your Word.
 Stay with us, Lord,
 until the last evening when, having closed our eyes,
 we will open them again to your face transfigured by glory
 and we too shall be found in the Father's arms in the Kingdom of
 eternal splendor. Amen.*



1

COUNSEL THE DOUBTERS

There are many examples of doubt presented to us in Scripture. Recall, for example, **Zechariah's** doubt when confronted with the angel's announcement in the temple, "How can I know this? I am old, and my wife is advanced in years" (Luke 1:18). This doubt is countered by **Mary's** "good" doubt: "How is this possible? I know no man" (Lk 1:34). We also recall the episode of **Nicodemus**, who visits Jesus at night to resolve his doubt, "How can a man be born when he is old?" (Jn 3:4), "...how can this happen?" (Jn 3:9), as well as the rich young man who asks the Lord, "What must I do to have eternal life?" or the evangelist Matthew's recollection of Jesus' last meeting with his disciples at the end of his Gospel: "The eleven disciples meanwhile went to Galilee, to the mountain Jesus had set for them. When they saw him, they prostrated themselves before him; but some doubted." (Mt 28:16-17).

Most well-known then is the episode of **Thomas**, in which doubt is even forcefully expressed, almost as an act of defiant challenge: "... If I do not see" (Jn. 20:24-29). Here I really like the attitude of Jesus who does not shy away from Thomas' doubt, but submits to his request for verification, almost as if to endorse it. Even our doubts in the face of incomprehensible and unacceptable situations such as an incurable disease, the death of a young man, the seemingly unchallenged dominance of violence, injustice, find great prominence in the Gospel.

But the most striking doubt is that which we grasp in the **Lord's cry on the cross**: "My God, why have you forsaken me!" there where we grasp that in the face of the ultimate challenge of death even Jesus, in his human nature, also because of the profound closeness and sharing of the drama of man, plunges into the dense and deep fog of doubt. Rather than the denial of faith, then, doubt can be grasped as inherent in the very structure of faith in the God of Israel manifested in history and revealed in the humanity of Jesus of Nazareth.

For these reasons, I believe that the doubter should be first and foremost not judged, but **loved, welcomed and listened** to with great respect and attention. In order to have the strength to do this, let us remember God's mercy toward our doubts and our many questions, and let us ask him to stand before the doubt of others with the same mercy and humility. But we who believe must also be careful: for the believer is not a holder of the truth, but always remains a seeker of it, even if this truth is known and confessed. Those who want to give good advice must first show closeness, love and respect toward the person asking for help. This is how Jesus was: close to the disciples, to the sick, to the suffering, to sinners. We live in a culture that exaggerates individualism and sometimes personal whim. This is why counseling the doubtful is instead viewed with suspicion in a culture where relativism reigns. Moreover, we all know that if our advice is not preceded by **serious reflection and even prayer**, it easily runs the risk of becoming manipulation, but at the same time we are aware that providing enlightening advice can prove to be an invaluable wealth for life. We must find the right way, the measure in this exercise of moral charity. "By quenching the thirst for truth of him who doubts, by wise counsel that comes from the Lord, you will have dug for him a well of fresh water." We know that nowadays many people, because of the complexities of life and the difficulties in reading and interpreting it, turn to fortune-tellers, palm readers and tarot cards, astrology and horoscopes. This only confirms the great sense of bewilderment and uncertainty of our times, together, however, with the need to find true and effective help.

The Council

Counsel, with a capital C, is one of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of Counsel as we know is the one that illuminates our hearts so that we understand the right way to speak and behave and the way forward. It is the one that gives us the ability to read life and particularly the most difficult and seemingly hopeless affairs with God's eyes. This ability, this power, does not come from us, but is a gift that God generously makes available: all you have to do is open your heart to receive it. So the first and fundamental indication concerns the importance of asking for the power of counsel in order to be able to understand how God stands before the situation about which we are asked for counsel.

What would Jesus say now? What would he read of the situation presented to us? I think that the more we live in union with God, the more we allow ourselves to be questioned and shaped by His Word, the more we feed on Him, the more we will be able to live in tune with truth and justice, and the more we will also be able to read deeply into people's hearts and into the complexity of situations in order to speak a good and helpful word to those who ask us for it. (Massimo Papotti)

An episode on the counsel of the doubters reported by Pope Francis: "I remember once in the sanctuary of Luján I was in the confessional, in front of which there was a long line. There was also a young boy who was all modern, with earrings, tattoos, all these things... And he came to tell me what was going on with him. It was a big, difficult problem. And he said, I told my mom all this and my mom said: **go to Our Mother** and she will tell you what you have to do. Here was a woman who had the gift of counsel. She did not know how to get out of her son's problem, but she pointed the right way: go to Our Lady and she will tell you. That is the gift of counsel. That humble, simple woman gave her son the truest advice. In fact, this boy told me: I looked at Our Mother and felt that I have to do this, this and this.... I didn't have to speak, his mom and the boy himself had already said it all. This is the gift of counseling. You moms who have this gift, ask for it for your children. The gift of counseling children is a gift from God."

SEQUENCE TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

Come, Holy Spirit

Send to us from heaven a ray of your light.

Come, father of the poor; come, giver of gifts; come, light of hearts. Perfect comforter; sweet guest of the soul, sweetest relief.

In toil, rest, in heat shelter, in weeping comfort.

O most blessed light, invade into the depths the hearts of your faithful. Without your strength nothing is in man, nothing without fault. Wash what is sordid, bathe what is parched, heal what bleeds. Bend that which is stiff, warm that which is icy, straighten that which is astray. Give to your faithful who trust in you alone your holy gifts. Give virtue and reward, give holy death, give eternal joy.

Amen



TEACH THE IGNORANT

«**T**hank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for you have hidden these things from the great and the wise and made them known to the little ones. Yes, Father, so you have willed. And he said again: The Father has put everything into my hands. No one knows the Son except the Father. No one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son makes him known. Come with me, all you who are weary and burdened: I will give you rest. Receive my words and be taught by me. I treat no one with violence and am good to all. You will find peace, for what I command you is for your own good; what I give you to bear is a light burden». (Matt. 11)

To allow oneself to be instructed, one must step into the shoes of the little ones Jesus speaks of in the Gospel, placing oneself in an attitude of abandonment, of trust in the teacher.

“Unlike works of corporal mercy, where (usually, if not always) the one who gives food is not hungry and the one who goes hungry is in no condition to give food, here the benefactor and the beneficiary are not properly distinguished. In fact, it is a good rule not to distinguish them at all: **of these “works” we are all recipients.** It is good, therefore, for each of us to consider ourselves both “instructor” and “ignorant,” wise counselor and doubter, champion of justice and sinner, and so on.” (Card. Giacomo Biffi)

- 16 percent of the world's population can neither read nor write; 67 million are children, mostly girls, between the ages of 5 and 9.
- still today 72 million children and 71 million adolescents do not have access to a school.
- Also globally, 759 million adults are unable to read and write. Two-thirds of the cases are women.
- The plight of more than one million Syrian children without schools.

Some would argue that this work of mercy is a bit out of course in the time we live in, the time of the Internet, the time when almost every

form of knowledge would seem to be within a mouse's reach. There is no doubt that in **the age of Google**, access to information has reached a level of ease never before experienced in the history of humanity (at least the so-called “connected” one), but we all sense that it is one thing to have information, another to know, that is, to change the way we see and interact with the world. An experience, that of knowing, which the great Augustine of Hippo linked to love, to say that without some form of attraction, of passion, of transport, of change, there can be no true knowledge. (Fr. Roberto D'Avanzo)

Today, the strange condition of man is that he knows everything except the things that matter, that he carries out the most complicated investigations and is **mute before the fundamental and simplest questions**, that he is able to go and pick up moon rocks and cannot tell himself what he came to earth to do. Ignoring what the meaning of our very living is; ignoring what destiny ultimately awaits us; ignoring whether our coming into existence has as its premise and reason a design of love or blind chance: this is the absurd night that objectively begs to be illuminated. The first and greatest act of charity that can be performed toward man is to tell him the way things are. Which also means revealing to him his authentic identity. This is the first mercy the Church exercises – must exercise – toward the human family: the tireless proclamation of the truth. (Cardinal Giacomo Biffi)

Plutarch, a Greek philosopher who lived at the beginning of the Christian era said: “**the teacher** is not one who fills a sack, but one who kindles flames,” to say that teaching is to broaden horizons, to unleash immense interests, to open one's eyes wide to the boundless beauty of reality.

Today's man often has much knowledge but little wisdom. **Wisdom** tells him how to use the world's means well, offers him sound moral standards. How many people ignore such principles and, as a result, are prisoners of sins, passions, selfishness and not infrequently also of drugs, alcohol, pornography, organized crime, etc.! Even more: how many people today live in ignorance of God: the most devastating and destructive poverty. Living without God, in fact, means living without a point of reference, without light, without hope! How many people, although they are baptized, do not know the faith, nor prayer, nor the sacraments. (Hermann Geissler F.S.O.)

Research finds that 69% of Italians have never read the four Gospels, that only 15% have read them at least once in their lives, leaves anyone who cares about the quality of Christian life and the transmission of the faith to new generations appalled. The data are especially astonishing when one considers that the majority of these people say they are “believers” and 17 percent even practice the faith.

The Church «strongly and insistently exhorts all the faithful to learn "the sublime science of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 3:8) by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures. "For ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ"» as St. Jerome says. (Catechism of the Catholic Church 133)

«**God himself is the first educator** who revealed himself to us creatures who were ignorant of the intimate essence of his Trinitarian life: “It pleased God in his goodness and wisdom to reveal himself in person and to manifest the mystery of his will, by which men through Christ made flesh have access to the Father in the Holy Spirit. For by this revelation the invisible God speaks to men as to friends in order to invite and admit them to communion with himself». (Dei Verbum, Second Vatican Council)

PRAYER (Wis 9:1-6. 9-11)

God of the fathers and Lord of mercy, who hast created all things by thy word, who by thy wisdom hast formed man, that thou mayest rule over the creatures which thou hast made, and rule the world with holiness and justice, and pronounce judgments with an upright mind, give me wisdom, which sitteth beside thee in thrones, and exclude me not from the number of thy children, for I am thy servant and the son of thy handmaid, a weak man and short-lived, incapable of understanding justice and laws.

Even the most perfect of men, deprived of your wisdom, would be esteemed a nothing. With you is the wisdom that knows your works, which was present when you created the world; it knows what is pleasing in your sight and what is in accordance with your decrees.

Send her from the holy heavens, from your glorious throne, that she may assist me and be with me in my labor and I may know what is pleasing to you.



ADMONISH SINNERS

«**H**ow will you be able to say to your brother: let me take the mote out of your eye, while in your eye is the beam?».(Mt. 7:4).

Admonishing sinners, a most delicate action that requires much humility and much love so that it does not turn into an unacceptable act of meddling in the lives of others.

Admonishing sinners should be done as when we clothe a poor person because we see him in his nakedness and have true compassion for him. Then we clothe him in the Name of Christ, with love, without asking him why he was naked... that question is up to God as when he asked Adam: “and who told you that you were naked?” When Adam commits the first sin he realizes for the first time that he is naked. God asked him: «Where are you?» He answered: «I heard your footsteps in the garden: I was afraid, for I am naked, and I hid myself». He resumed: «Who made it known to you that you were naked? ...» (Gen.3:1-22). To admonish the sinner is to warn him of the sins he commits and thus of his being naked. (Lucetta Scaraffia)

“Sinners” and “admonish,” are two words that are hard on our ears. Pope Francis often says he is a sinner. All of us are sinners. But so many people of our time do not agree with this statement, they do not consider themselves sinners, but rather righteous, with some small “human” flaw.

The sense of sin has disappeared in many hearts. This is a logical consequence of the disappearance of the sense of God. Pius XII said back in the 1950s that “the sin of the century is the loss of the sense of sin” What would he say today?

Another problem is added: Today everything about God, religion and sin is considered a “**private thing**,” and entering this sphere is seen as interfering in another's private sphere, as not respecting his or her conscience and freedom. This would be contrary to the necessary

tolerance and peace and therefore unsocial behavior. But this position is unacceptable, because it reduces religion to a “private thing,” while it actually concerns all of life, our relationship with God, with our neighbor, with the world, with ourselves.

It is important, therefore, to awaken consciences by talking about God and His truth and calling by name the grave sins that destroy human beings, families and society: superstition, idolatry, blasphemy, hatred, abortion, adultery, divorce, tax fraud, gambling, backbiting, etc. Trying, with gentleness, to make people who commit such sins understand that they are not following the path of life is not an offense against them, but – on the contrary – is a true work of mercy.

Recognizing the evil of one's sin is the first condition so that, with the help of divine mercy, a person can leave the path that leads to death, so that he can heal and find life again. St. James writes, “My brothers, if one of you strays from the truth and another leads him back to it, let him know that he who leads a sinner back from his path of error will save him from death” (Jas. 5:19f.) We could be “spiritual doctors” for one another. (Hermann Geissler F.S.O.)

Mercy is the way God-Trinity relates to the sinner

The moment evil, sin has entered a person's life God's behavior is to intensify His love for that person. God's goal is to **“make righteous”** the person who has done evil: to free him from evil, to put him back in “right relationship” with himself, with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. «I don't want the sinner's death, but for him to be converted and live». God's Intervention is “a more of love,” a more intense investment of free love, in the hope that the sinner will realize that he is loved and return to Him.

The justice of God-Trinity-Mercy desires that the sinner, accepting His free Love, will return to Him; this is **conversion out of love**.

It helps him to recognize his sin to decide to abandon it because sin destroys His plan of love that gives meaning to each person's life. Thus God-Trinity-Mercy resumes His dialogue of love so that the person “may live.”

This sequence can be called a **“super gift,” forgiveness**. This is Mercy.

God's action is not to erase sin, to forget sins, but it is aimed at the person of the sinner: **a reconstructive intervention.**

The God-Trinity-Mercy JUSTIFIES, makes one righteous, that is, capable of resuming dialogue with Him. The apex of Mercy is this Justice of God: creative, restorative, justifying, restoring man to his dignity as a “child of God.” (F.C.)

«... it is necessary to acknowledge that we are sinners in order to strengthen in us the certainty of divine mercy. “Lord, I am a sinner; Lord, I am a sinner: come with your mercy.” This is a beautiful prayer. It is an easy prayer to say every day, “Lord, I am a sinner; Lord, I am a sinner: come with your mercy.”».

(Pope Francis)

Prayer for the conversion of sinners

Jesus told Sister M. Faustina Kowalska, “Prayer for the conversion of sinners is most pleasing to Me. I always grant it.”

*Jesus, eternal truth and our life,
like a beggar I implore your Mercy for sinners.
Sweetest Heart of my Lord full of compassion and mercy, I beseech
Thee for them.
Oh Heart, source of Mercy,
from which gush forth upon all mankind incomparable rays of grace,
I ask from you light for those who are in sin.
Jesus, remember your bitter passion
And do not allow to be lost
souls ransomed so dearly by thy blood.
Oh Jesus, when I meditate on the great value of your blood,
I rejoice in such greatness
for although sin is an abyss of ingratitude and wickedness,
yet the price that was paid for it
Is infinitely greater than sin.
An immense joy is kindled in my heart
Admiring this inconceivable goodness of yours.
Oh my Jesus, I desire to bring all sinners to your feet,
that they may glorify your Mercy which is infinite. Amen*



CONSOLE THE AFFLICTED

« I will pray to the Father, and he will give you another Comforter, the Spirit of truth, whom the Father will send in my name; he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you»
(Jn. 14:25-26)

An evangelical, mysterious and profound icon of the consolation of the afflicted is that concerning Jesus on the night of his passion.

«Having come to the place, he said to them, "Pray, lest you enter into temptation." Then he departed from them about a stone's throw, fell on his knees and prayed, saying, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me! Yet not my will, but your will be done." An angel then appeared to him from heaven to comfort him. He entered the struggle and prayed more intensely, and his sweat became like drops of blood falling to the ground. Then, rising from prayer, he went to the disciples and found them asleep from sadness». (Lk22,39-45)

Jesus' grief fills his disciples with sadness, and they escape Jesus' affliction by taking refuge in sleep. Only an angel, who comes from heaven, can stay close to Jesus and console him: it is not known what he did or said, but he gives Jesus the strength to enter deeply into the struggle and not to fall prey to despair. (Blessed Paul VI Community)

Perhaps never more than in this time of the dictatorship of relativism is man — who is always and everywhere “begging for meaning and fulfillment” — lacking in meaning and perspective, and therefore afflicted. The massive use of **anti-anxiety drugs** — worldwide — gives us a reliable and alarming sign of this. Lack of goods, material and spiritual; sickness and suffering; disorientation and abandonment cause us to weep. Who then can console him? And what characteristics must consolation have to be effective? Jesus, before He ascended to the Father, promised men the perfect Comforter, as He is called in the sequence of the Veni Sancte Spiritus: **Perfect Comforter**, sweet guest

of the soul, sweetest relief. Paraclete is the term by which St. John in his gospel refers to the **Spirito Santo**. Taken from legal language, the Latin equivalent is *advocatus*, literally “called near,” the lawyer understood as defender and by extension consoler. In legal texts it indicates, in a trial, “one who stands by the side of the accused” to defend him. (Chiara Mantovani)

Those who set out to console the afflicted will never remain unemployed in this world; consoling the afflicted is undoubtedly one of the most practicable and ever-needed works of mercy, but one that certainly cannot be delegated to a welfare institution.

Pope Benedict XVI writes in number 28 of his encyclical ***Deus caritas est*** (God is love): «Love — *caritas* — will always be necessary, even in the most just society. No just state order can ever make the service of love superfluous. Those who want to eliminate love also want to eliminate human beings as such. There will always be suffering which requires consolation and help. There will always be loneliness. There will always be situations of material need where help is essential as an expression of concrete love for one's neighbor. The **State** that wants to provide for everything, that absorbs everything into itself, ultimately becomes a bureaucratic agency that cannot ensure the essential thing that the suffering person — every person — needs: loving personal dedication. What we need is not a State that regulates and dominates everything, but rather a State that generously recognizes and supports, in line with the principle of subsidiarity, the initiatives that arise from the various social forces and combine spontaneity and closeness to people in need of help. The Church is one of these living forces: in it pulsates the dynamic of love aroused by the Spirit of Christ».

The afflicted should not be comforted but consoled. The use of the verb “**console**”, (not to be confused with “comfort”), indicates a positive action that, by responding to the needs of others, eliminates the causes of suffering and recreates the previous conditions of well-being. While comfort is limited to a pious and useless moral exhortation, consolation must aim to eliminate the causes of suffering. When this does not happen, consolation becomes a nuisance, as Job complained, afflicted by an enormity of misfortunes, with friends trying to make him understand the reason for so many misfortunes: “I have already heard

many similar things! You are all **annoying comforters**. Will there be no end to these empty words? I too could talk like you if I were you: I would drown you with words... I would comfort you with my mouth ...”
 (Job 16:1-4) (Alberto Maggi)

Giving consolation is an effort that requires work on oneself. The words and attitudes of those who offer their condolences are often the pride of superficiality, the triumph of embarrassment, a dutiful ritual that one cannot escape but is not up to. Only those who have experienced grief and have been able to live with the pain, to accept the emptiness, to let themselves be shaped by the loss, can dignify that encounter with their discretion and their understanding of what is happening in the soul of the bereaved. And the “appropriate” words or gestures made to those in mourning remain etched in the memory of those who received them like a precious and rare gem. Such is the power of consolation. (F. Lamendola)

A journalist insisted on being allowed to photograph her eyes because “the Mother had an ugly face, but the most beautiful and happy eyes, never seen even in actors, queens, models ...”. **Mother Teresa** having heard this, replied: “Do you want to know why my eyes are so happy? The secret is very simple: my eyes are happy because my hands dry so many tears! Do the same, I assure you that you will feel the same joy!” (Testimony of Cardinal Angelo Comastri)

To Our Lady of Consolation

*chosen by God to become Mother of the Savior
 through the Holy Spirit,
 graciously hear our prayers:*

*You, who have the cross as your staff, have endured moments of
 unspeakable pain, you know how to understand those who weep
 and you have the power to dry our tears.*

*We beg you: come to the aid and console with motherly love
 all who trustingly invoke You from this valley of tears.*

*Visit our families, comfort the sick,
 protect children and young people,*

and bring back to the right path those who have lost their way.

*You who are now at the side of the Divine Son, certainly blessed,
 sustain our faith, revive our hope,*

*increase our charity, so that, following your wonderful example, we
 may one day reach you in eternal happiness. Amen.*



FORGIVE THE OFFENSES

It is the only work of mercy that does not look at people. But it focuses on one thing: the offense. It is more vast. It has no boundaries. It is not limited to one category, because it covers and involves the heart of all of us. Day by day. Because forgiveness is in fact decisive and discriminating in the construction of society and the family. Because it starts from the heart and speaks to the heart! **Forgiveness is therefore the pinnacle for the believer.** It is the human action that most closely corresponds to the divine. But **the social value of forgiving offenses** is also immense. Where there is forgiveness, there is a garden, growth, the scent of blessing. On the other hand, where there is no forgiveness, the desert advances and everything closes in on itself, comes to a standstill.

And just as forgiveness is the action that brings us closest to God the Father, so forgiveness is the truest sign of our dignity as human beings. In forgiveness, heaven and earth, God and man, humility and greatness are wonderfully intertwined. (Giancarlo Bregantini)

In the most dramatic moment of his earthly presence, **Jesus** breaks the chains tied by his assailants, knocks down the wall built by his executioners, deeply moving our hearts with the forgiveness he offers his tormentors, instantly tearing away the darkness of that terrible moment, when he asks the Father to forgive them: “Forgive them Father, for they know not what they do.” (Claudio Barbieri)

Among the unheard-of evangelical instructions, the most surprising is perhaps this: “If your brother sins seven times a day against you and **seven times a day** says to you: I repent, you will forgive him” (Luke 17:4). This is already a difficult undertaking; but at least here we are dealing with an offender who apologizes. In reality, the overall teaching of Christ is broader and more unconditional: “And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your sins” (Mk 11:25). In this school, the

apostles teach: "Do not repay anyone evil for evil (Rm 12,17); on the contrary, "bless those who persecute you" (Rm 12,14).

It is a language that we have heard so many times that it no longer impresses us. But its practical application is very far from human customs, in which cultivated resentments and grudges dominate. One of the strongest causes of **social malaise** is the rampant hatred and revenge, which trigger an endless chain of reprisals and therefore of suffering. Hence the importance of the fifth mercy that the Church brings to the world: the encouragement to make the "culture of forgiveness" prevail in everyone. (Cardinal Giacomo Biffi)

The Lord's Prayer puts us firmly under a magnifying glass, confronting us with our responsibilities and inviting us to consciously examine our position. That on the one hand we must be active in giving substance to forgiveness and on the other hand we must rely on the Lord's mercy when asking to be forgiven. "... and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors..." We immediately see that in the process of forgiveness there is a substantial truth: those who are **aware of God's forgiveness** know how to forgive. Because when we look at those who have offended us with compassion and mercy, we also recognize that we are offenders and therefore in need of humbly and trustingly asking for God's forgiveness. (Claudio Barbieri)

Courage and the strength to forgive are at the heart of the Christian life, but also the way to build deep and lasting human relationships. Jesus constantly invites us to forgive offenses. Of course, forgiving is difficult, in the world it sometimes appears as a weak reaction, almost against our spontaneous instinct. **Revenge**, on the other hand, appears to be the reaction of a strong person. But revenge solves nothing, on the contrary: it makes the heart more and more bitter, it closes it in on itself, it acts like poison that can have devastating effects. (Hermann Geissler F.S.O.)

Forgiveness "from the heart" helps us **not to keep a mental** dossier on the other person, which is always reactivated when another small thing happens. In this sense, the following invitation from Mother Julia is very important: "Let today be the day you put an end to the past. Let today be the day you set fire to all the books of debts, to the registers and statements you still keep in your heart: burn everything in the fire of God's merciful love. That's right, light a big fire: the bigger the debt, the stronger the light will burst forth. Behave differently towards each other, as if you were seeing each

other for the first time; yes, I repeat, forget everything that you have kept in your mind. Start again with the help of grace and faith” (January 25, 1981). (The Venerable Mother Julia, Mexican 1881 - 1974 - Missionary Daughters of the Most Pure Virgin Mary)

But how far humanity has come on this difficult and demanding but **liberating journey along the road to forgiveness!** And with every step, with every stage, humanity has grown. It has freed itself from the tragedy of revenge, of the positive theorization of war (even if it remains in our hearts as tragic “madness!”), from the death penalty!

And now, starting from the forgiveness of offenses, we have **new challenging** goals to achieve, such as the verification and improvement of the prison system, the progressive elimination of life imprisonment, new spaces for reconciliation in the family, a respectful approach to politics and trade unions, the strength of non-violence.... the care of Creation!

PRAYER

The loving plan of God the Father, his heart is clearly shown in the famous preface in the second Eucharistic prayer of reconciliation, which reads as follows:

“We recognize your fatherly love when you bend the hardness of man and in a world torn by strife and discord, you make him available for reconciliation.

By the power of the Spirit, you act in the depths of our hearts, so that enemies may open themselves to dialogue, adversaries may shake hands

and peoples may meet in harmony.

By your gift, Oh Father, the sincere search for peace extinguishes quarrels, love conquers hatred and vengeance is disarmed by forgiveness!



6

BEAR WRONGS
PATIENTLY

A famous text from the Christian tradition, specifically Franciscan, allows us to critically introduce ourselves to this work of mercy in a critical and problematic way. In the [Fioretti](#), Francis explains to Brother Leo what perfect joy consists of and tells him:

When we are at Santa Maria degli Agnoli, so wet from the rain and frozen from the cold, muddy with lotus and afflicted with hunger, and we knock on the door of the place, and a porter will come angry and say: Who are you? And we shall say: We are two of your friars; and he shall say: You do not speak the truth, but rather you are two rogues who go about deceiving the world and stealing the alms of the poor; go away; and he will not open the door to us, and will make us stay outside in the snow and rain, cold and hungry until nightfall; Then if we endure such injury and such cruelty and so many partings, we will bear patiently, not upset and not grumbling about him, and we will humbly think that that porter truly knows us, that God makes him speak against us; oh brother Leo, write that here is perfect joy. And if indeed we persevere in knocking, and he comes out upset, and like importunate ruffians he chases us away with insults and blows, saying: “Begone, you vile little thieves, go to the hospital, for here you shall neither eat nor be sheltered. If we endure this patiently and with joy and good will, O Brother Leo, write that there is perfect joy there.”

And if we, constrained by hunger and cold and the night, should knock and call and pray for the love of God with great weeping that he open and let us in, and those more disgusted should say: These are troublesome rascals, I will pay them well as they deserve; and he will come out with a club, and catch us by the hood and throw us on the ground and wrap us in the snow and beat us with that club, knot by knot: if we endure all these things patiently and joyfully, thinking of the sufferings of blessed Christ, which we must endure for his love; oh brother Leo, write that here and in this there is perfect joy.

The text asks us: **who is “harassing”** in this story? The two friars who insistently knock looking for shelter from the cold and the night? Or those who don't want to welcome them, making excuses and not listening to reason? Or rather: when is a person considered a nuisance? When, and why, do they disturb us? When do we feel that a person is unbearable? Why does a certain behavior of a person annoy us? In perceiving annoyance in front of someone and in feeling their unbearability, there is also **a revelation of ourselves to ourselves**. When we consider someone annoying and bothersome, it may simply be the expression of selfish and racist feelings, or of fear and refusal to face up to the situation. For example, consider the feeling many people have towards immigrants who come to our country.

Furthermore, this text presents a sensational case of refusal of patience and tolerance towards those who are perceived as annoying, but also a heroic case of tolerance and patience towards the unbearability of others that has turned into aggressive violence. This endurance is founded on the Gospel and the example of Christ and made possible by faith. In fact, Francis continues his conversation with Brother Leo by stating that the **grace of the Holy Spirit** is to be able to conquer oneself and willingly endure pain, insults, shame and hardship for the love of Christ, without boasting of this, but placing one's pride solely in the cross of Christ: “In the cross of tribulation and affliction we can glory, for the Apostle says: I want to glory only in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ (Gal 6,14)”.

Patience is God's broad gaze towards man, a gaze that does not stop at details, at setbacks, that does not consider sin as definitive, but places it within the entire existential journey that man is called to travel. Therefore it exposes God to the risk of not being taken seriously, of being “used” by man. In Christ, and particularly in his passion and death, God's patience reaches its peak in the radical assumption of man's inadequacy and weakness, of his sin.

In Christ, God accepts to “bear the burden”, to “endure” human incompleteness and inadequacy, taking on the responsibility for man and his fallibility. The “patience of Christ” (2 Ts 3,5) thus expresses the love of God, it is its sacrament.

Today, however, patience has lost much of its charm: hurried times lead to impatience, to not putting things off, to “everything and immediately”, to possession that leaves no room for waiting. Individualistic self-affirmation becomes **an unwillingness to wait and understand** others, who too quickly risk becoming annoying or bothersome, certainly in the way. And so patience, which was once a wise and humane way of living in the world, is now consigned to oblivion. At the same time, it must be realistically recognized that patience is not always a virtue, just as impatience is not always a non-virtue.

Patience is an art. It has nothing to do with passively suffering. On the contrary, those who don't have patience are much more likely to suffer. Patient but free and loving endurance towards those who are annoying, unpleasant, boring, or slow, is in line with loving one's enemy (cf. Mt 5:38-48; Lk 6:27-35). And it requires work on oneself to learn to recognize and love the enemy within us, what is annoying in us, what is unbearable to ourselves and that God, in Christ, has patiently endured by loving us unconditionally. In this way, patience becomes an opening to the future for the other, a confirmation of trust in him, a struggle together with him and for him against the temptation of despair.

(Luciano Manicardi)

ASKED GOD by Kirk Kilgour

*I asked God to give me strength to carry out great projects:
“He made me weak so that I could remain humble.*

I asked God to give me health so that I could accomplish great things: He gave me pain so that I could understand it better.

*I asked Him for wealth so that I could possess everything:
He made me poor so that I could be generous.*

I asked him for power so that men would need me: He gave me humiliation so that I should need them. I asked God for everything so that I could enjoy life:

He gave me life so that I could appreciate everything.

*Lord, I received none of what I asked for,
but you gave me everything I needed, and almost against my will.*

The prayers I did not make were answered.

*Praise be to Thee; Oh my Lord,
of all men none possess what I possess!”*



NOSTRO

PADRE PADRE

PRAY TO GOD FOR THE LIVING AND THE DEAD

Pray to God. Pope Francis' message for the 2016 World Day of Peace opens with three very significant statements: **“God is not indifferent! God cares about humanity, God does not abandon it!”** God is the wise architect of my life. I cannot make my plans, act accordingly, and then expect God to do the manual labor in the construction.

We build it together, in “collaboration”. We need to be aware of the reversal of perspective that Christianity brings with respect to pagan prayer: **the pagan prays to conquer the gods**, to capture their favor, to get them on his side. For the Christian it's the opposite: I don't have to convince God, because he's already on my side, on the side of what's good. I'm the one who needs to convince myself and put myself on God's side; **I don't pray to convert God, but to convert others, and myself with them.**

For the living

The work of mercy we are examining in depth, refers in particular to the **prayer of intercession**, the prayer for others. To intercede means “to step between”, “to come between”, to place oneself between two parties to try to build a bridge, a communication between them. “Walking in the middle”, ready to help each of the two parties. In intercession we take upon ourselves the burdens of those for whom we pray: it is a prayer that refers to God's plan and allows us to participate in his work of salvation.

Using an image from the book of Job, we can say that the intercessor is the one who places **one hand on God and one on man**, becoming a bridge between the two: “Is there not a judge between us who might lay hands on us?” (Job 9:33).

Every Christian is called to intercede and to have a special role to play in relation to all of humanity: those who follow Jesus share the respon-

sibility for the salvation of the whole world. Therefore, the presence of many intercessors is a means to realize a community that corresponds to God's plan and to promote the work of reconciliation between individuals, peoples, cultures and religions, and between man and his God. This great river of intercession is immersed in the ocean of Christ's intercession.

Jesus the intercessor

Let's think about his position on the cross, when his being between heaven and earth, with his arms outstretched to bring all men to God, becomes a narration of the ultimate outcome of intercession: **the giving of life for sinners** by the one who is holy, the "dying for" the unjust by the one who is just. Jesus' prayer on the cross: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Lk 23,34) summarizes a whole life spent before God for others and shows Jesus who became intercession himself through his life and death. The Risen Lord continues to intercede for all mankind from on high, St. Paul writes to the Romans: "He has been raised from the dead, and is now at the right hand of God, and intercedes for us!" (Rm 8,34).

For the dead

The Church has always invited us to pray for the dead, in particular by offering the Eucharistic Celebration for them: it is the best spiritual help we can give to their souls, especially to those most abandoned.

In Lumen Gentium we read that the Church: "from the earliest days of the Christian religion has had a reverent regard for the memory of the dead" (LG 50). By praying for the dead the Church inserts herself into God's plan of salvation which has as its goal the Kingdom, the final resurrection, eternal life.

At the basis of this prayer there is therefore a **bond of solidarity** in mutual love: we pray for the dead because we love them. And they too continue to love us, with a love even greater than the love they had for us during their earthly life, because now they are no longer limited by the frailty of human nature; now they love with the same power of God's love.

In prayer we experience communion with them, while we ask them to accompany us from heaven and to speak to God about us; we also express the conviction that love is stronger than death. Because physical

cannot dissolve the bonds of love and charity, which unite us all in one body. When we pray for the deceased, it is enough for us to know that their love of God continues to grow and that they need our support, just as we need theirs. (Andrea Brandolini Collegiata di San Giovanni in Persiceto January 17, 2016 Catechesis for adults)

PRAYER by Pope Francis

*God of infinite mercy,
we entrust to your immense goodness
those who have left this world for eternity,
where you await all of humanity,
redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, your Son,
who died to atone for our sins.
Do not look, Lord, at the many forms of poverty, misery and human
weakness, when we will appear before your court,
to be judged for our happiness or our condemnation.
Turn your merciful gaze upon us,
which is born of the tenderness of your heart,
and help us to walk on the path of complete purification.
None of your children should be lost in the eternal fire of hell,
where there can be no repentance.
We entrust to you, Lord, the souls of our loved ones,
of the people who died without sacramental comfort,
or did not have the opportunity to repent even at
the end of their lives.
May no one fear to meet you,
after the earthly pilgrimage,
in the hope of being welcomed into the arms of your infinite mercy.
Sister Bodily Death, may we be found watchful in prayer
and laden with every good deed done during the course
of our brief or long existence.
Lord, may nothing on this earth separate us from you,
but may everything and everyone spur us on in our ardent desire
to rest peacefully and eternally in you.
Amen.*

(Angelus - November 2, 2014)

SISTER MARIE-ANASTASIA CARRÉ



Sister Marie-Anastasia Carré is a consecrated religious, artist and professor of plastic arts. She was born into a family where art was passed down from generation to generation. ***"In my family, I realized how art is a way of loving. Our parents passed on to us the gift of marveling".***

She studied art at the *Université d'Arts Plastiques* in Rennes France, and then became a teacher at a *Collège*.

A strong spiritual experience changed the course of her life, when she felt the call to follow Christ as a consecrated person in the *Community of the Beatitudes*. At that moment she suspended all artistic activities for several years. But when she was asked to prepare a course of artistic activities for a juvenile prison in the

Philippines, she rediscovered the influence of artistic experience in human life. ***"It's as if the Lord had said to me: it's good that you help others to express themselves, to communicate, but doesn't this also apply to you?"*** And it is precisely in Asia that color bursts into her life, whereas before she had used only black and white.

Her community encourages this artistic vocation in the service of evangelization.

Art is for her today a mission, but also an artistic way of living united with God, a school of spiritual and human life; it is love.

“Before being squares, drawings or paintings, they are opportunities to let myself be transformed by the Word of God and to respond to it. Painting is transformed into an act of faith or love”.

This artistic expression has found a place in the charisma of his Community and has become an opportunity to reveal the beauty of God in the liturgy, in fraternal life and in missionary activity. Art and beauty present in the liturgy and in places of prayer are like bridges or like the arms of God open to the encounter with man. ***“Art is capable of expressing and making visible the human need to go beyond what is seen; it expresses the thirst for and the search for the infinite”.*** (Benedict XVI)

Sister Marie-Anastasia has just finished an exhibition for the Jubilee of Mercy in the south of France, on the theme of ***“Meeting God through art”***. Her works develop in two directions, one liturgical responding to requests for places of retreat, and the other a project to proclaim the Gospel through images: ***“My paintings are like missionaries sent where God wants and allows good to be done”***.

The face, the encounter, the inner self, the relationship with God are his main themes. By dipping his brush in the Word of God, his art becomes looks, gestures, colors. Christ who becomes a Face so we can meet him, speaks to the people he reaches with his gaze. ***“The image gathers all the Word, it makes the gospel visible”***.(Council of Constantinople VI)

The artist is sometimes asked to take part in a test where she has to create a painting on the spot, during a meeting. These paintings thus become a visual echo to the preaching. The painting silently says what the Word of God says with the voice. In addition, Sister Marie-Anastasia also offers retreats that she calls: “Painting as prayer” intended for Christian artists of varying degrees of faith to help them meditate on the Word of God through the use of images that become a testimony of the grace received.

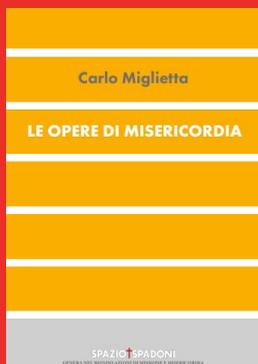
In addition to acrylic and watercolor techniques, Sister Marie-Anastasia also expresses herself through fresco. In her work, the artist likes to use relief with thick, rough materials. The design is deeply engraved, just as the Word is called to be deeply engraved in our hearts. Through colors and materials, each work of art stammers its thirst for God.

You can find his works at: <http://srmarieanastasia.wix.com/artiste>

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THE JOURNEY INTO MERCY CONTINUES



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