

Prelate Speaks about the Works of Mercy (Introduction)

For the Jubilee Year, we will offer each month an audio of the Prelate speaking about each of the works of mercy, with a transcription in English of his words. The December recording is an introduction to the series.

12/01/2015

The Extraordinary Jubilee convoked by Pope Francis places mercy at the

center of attention on our Christian path. The Holy Father writes that mercy is “a key word that indicates God’s action towards us. He does not limit himself merely to affirming his love, but makes it visible and tangible.”[1]

Each of God’s children can be a witness to his love in our own life, and also to the fact that we are called to respond to this love with love. The Pope invites everyone to be bearers of God’s mercy, which we have personally experienced so many times. We need only remember how often God forgives us—always!—in the sacrament of Penance. Therefore the upcoming months should be “a special time for the Church, a time when the witness of believers might grow stronger and more effective.”[2]

Our Lord’s closeness should never be for us something abstract; it has to be

shown each day in specific deeds, in the “intentions, attitudes, and behaviors that are shown in daily living.”^[3] The successor of Peter writes: “The mercy of God is his loving concern for each one of us. He feels responsible; that is, he desires our well-being and he wants to see us happy, full of joy, and peaceful. This is the path which the merciful love of Christians must also travel. As the Father loves, so do his children. Just as he is merciful, so we are called to be merciful to each other.”^[4]

Thus the works of mercy that our Lord passed on to his Church take on great importance. Jesus Christ, “the face of the Father’s mercy,” invites Christians to turn their eyes to Him constantly and attentively, with the desire to unite ourselves to his life, to imitate Him just as little children imitate their parents or older siblings.

St. Josemaria Escrivá, founder of Opus Dei, had a passionate concern for the corporal and spiritual works of mercy during his earthly journey, following Jesus' example. As he wrote in one of his homilies: "It is easy to understand the impatience, anxiety and uneasiness of people whose naturally Christian soul stimulates them to fight the personal and social injustice which the human heart can create. So many centuries of men living side by side and still so much hate, so much destruction, so much fanaticism stored up in eyes that do not want to see and in hearts that do not want to love!"[5]

St. Josemaria continues by describing some of the evils that afflict the world: "The good things of the earth, monopolized by a handful of people; the culture of the world, confined to cliques. And, on the outside, hunger for bread and education. Human lives—holy, because they come from

God—treated as mere things, as statistics.”^[6]

Seeing the absence of mercy and authentic fraternity, we can’t let ourselves become discouraged.

Rather we should heed the advice of St. John of the Cross: “Where there is no love, put love—and you will find love.” We are called—each and every one of us!—to be *other Christs, Christ himself*, and so to act in his name, spreading charity everywhere. St. Josemaria also said that Jesus is “continually inviting us to put his new commandment of love—the *mandatum novum*—into practice . . .

We must learn to recognize Christ when he comes out to meet us in our brothers, the people around us. No human life is ever isolated. It is bound up with other lives. No man or woman is a single verse; we all make up one divine poem which God writes with the cooperation of our freedom.”^[7]

Perhaps someone could think, especially in the more developed countries, that advances in social and health care, labor agreements, etc., make the traditional works of mercy unnecessary, or even superfluous. But this isn't so! Even in the most fully developed countries, many people still fall sway to poverty, and lack the most basic needs or suffer from loneliness and abandonment, despite having material means at their disposal. Years ago, the founder of Opus Dei accurately observed that, when historical circumstances seem to have overcome misery and pain, precisely then will the acute need for true Christian fraternity become even more urgent, a fraternity that can detect where someone is in need of consolation, including amidst apparent overall well-being.

With God's help, throughout these months I plan to offer some considerations on each of the

fourteen works of mercy, spiritual and corporal, with the hope that they will leave a deeper impression on our daily lives. Amid the ups and downs of each day—in our work, family life, and relationships with others—the Master is inviting us to identify ourselves with Him.

In this way, our earthly journey alongside Christ can become a “school of mercy.”

[1] Francis, Bull *Misericordiae Vultus*, no. 10.

[2] *Ibid.*, no. 3.

[3] *Ibid.*, no. 9.

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] Saint Josemaria, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 111.

[6] *Ibid.*

[7] *Ibid.*

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