**WITNESSES OF MERCY**

**Pope Francis**

How can we be witnesses of mercy? We do not think that it has to do with making great efforts or superhuman gestures. No, it is not like this. The Lord indicates to us a much simpler way, made up of little gestures, which, however, in His eyes have great value, to the point that He said to us that it is on these that we will be judged.

In fact, one of the most beautiful pages of Mark’s Gospel reports to us a teaching that we can regard in some way as “Jesus’ testament” on the part of the evangelist, who experienced directly in himself the action of Mercy. Jesus says that every time we feed someone who is hungry and give drink to someone who is thirsty, that we clothe a naked person and receive a stranger, that we visit a sick or imprisoned “person”, we do it to Him (cf. *Matthew* 25:31-46). The Church has called these gestures “*works of corporal mercy,*” because they help persons in their material needs.

There are, however, seven other *works of mercy called “spiritual,’* which have to do with other equally important needs, especially today, because they touch the depth of persons and often make one suffer more. We all certainly remember one that has entered our common language: “To endure annoying persons patiently.” It might seem to be something of little importance, which makes us smile, instead, it contains a sentiment of profound charity; and it is so also for the other six, which it is good to recall: to counsel the doubtful, to teach the ignorant, to admonish sinners, to console the afflicted, to forgive offenses, to pray to God for the living and the dead.

The Church presents these works to us as the concrete way to live mercy. So many persons in the course of the centuries put them into practice, thus giving genuine witness of the faith. Moreover, the Church, faithful to her Lord, nourishes a preferential love for the weakest. Often they are the persons closest to us who need our help.

We do not have to go in search of endeavours to carry out. It is better to begin with the simplest, which the Lord points out as the most urgent. In a world stricken, unfortunately, by the virus of indifference, the works of mercy are the best antidote. In fact, they educate us to pay attention to the most elementary needs of our “least brothers” (*Matthew* 25:40), in whom Jesus is present.

To recognize His face in that of one who is in need is a real challenge against indifference. It enables us to be always vigilant, avoiding Christ, passing beside us without our recognizing Him. Saint Augustine’s phrase comes to mind: *“I fear Jesus passing by”* (*Sermon* 88, 14, 13). I wondered why Saint Augustine said he was *afraid* of Jesus’ passing. The answer, unfortunately, is in our behaviour, because we are often distracted, indifferent, and when the Lord passes close to us we lose the occasion of meeting with Him.

The works of mercy awaken in us the need and capacity to render faith alive and active with charity. I am convinced that through these simple daily gestures we can carry out a true cultural revolution, as happened in the past. How many Saints are still remembered today not for the great works they did but for the charity they were able to transmit!

We think of Mother Teresa, just canonized: we do not remember her for the many houses she opened in the world, but because she bent over every person she found in the middle of the street to restore his or her dignity. How many abandoned children she held in her arms; how many dying “persons”, on the threshold of eternity, she accompanied holding their hand!

These works of mercy are the features of the Face of Jesus Christ, who takes care of his least brothers to bring to each of them God’s tenderness and closeness. May the Holy Spirit enkindle in us the desire to live with this style of life; may we learn again by heart the works of corporal and spiritual mercy and ask the Lord to help us to put them into practice every day.

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