



(ZENIT, Vatican City, September 21, 2016).- Here is a ZENIT translation of Pope Francis' address at this morning's general audience in St. Peter's Square.

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Dear Brothers and Sisters, good morning!

We heard the passage of Luke's Gospel (6:36-38) from which the motto of this Extraordinary Holy Year is taken: Merciful as the Father. The complete expression is: "Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful" (v. 36). It is not a slogan for effect, but a commitment of life. To understand this expression well, we can compare it with the parallel one in Matthew's Gospel, where Jesus says: "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (5:48). In the so-called Sermon on the Mount, which opens with the Beatitudes, the Lord teaches that perfection consists in love, fulfillment of all the precepts of the Law. In this same perspective, Saint Luke specifies that perfection is merciful love: to be perfect means to be merciful. Is a person who is not merciful perfect? No! Goodness and perfection are rooted in mercy. God is certainly perfect. However, if we consider Him in that way, it becomes impossible for men to strive to that absolute perfection. Instead, having Him before our eyes as merciful enables us to understand better in what His perfection consists and it spurs us to be like Him, full of love, of understanding and of mercy.

But I wonder: are Jesus' words realistic? Is it really possible to love as God loves and to be merciful as He is?

If we look at the history of salvation, we see that the whole of God's revelation is an incessant and tireless love for men: God is like a father or a mother who loves with unfathomable love and pours it out abundantly on every creature. Jesus' death on the cross is the summit of God's history of

love for man. A love that is so great that only God can realize it. It is evident that, compared to this love that has no measure, our love will always be defective. However, when Jesus asks us to be merciful as the Father, He does not think of the quantity! He asks His disciples to become sign, channels, and witnesses of His mercy.

And the Church cannot but be the sacrament of mercy of God in the world, at all times and towards the whole of humanity. Hence, every Christian is called to be a witness of mercy, and this happens on the path of holiness. We think of the many Saints that became merciful because they let their heart be filled by divine mercy. They gave flesh to the Lord's love, pouring it out on the many needs of suffering humanity. In this flowering of so many forms of charity it is possible to perceive the reflections of the merciful face of Christ.

We ask ourselves: What does it mean for disciples to be merciful? Jesus explains it with two verbs: "forgive" (v. 37) and "give" (v. 38).

Mercy is expressed, first of all, in forgiveness: "Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven" (v.37). Jesus does not intend to subvert the course of human justice, however, He reminds the disciples that to have fraternal relations it is necessary to suspend judgments and condemnations. Forgiveness, in fact, is the pillar that governs the life of the Christian community, because in it is shown the gratuitousness of the love with which God loved us first. A Christian must forgive! — but why? Because he has been forgiven. All of us who are here, today, in the Square, have been forgiven. No one, in his life, has not been in need of God's forgiveness. And because we have been forgiven, we must forgive. We recite it every day in the Our Father: "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us," that is, forgive the offenses, forgive many things, because we have been forgiven so many offenses, so many sins. And so it is easy to forgive: if God has forgiven me, why should I not forgive others? Am I greater than God? This pillar of forgiveness shows us the gratuitousness of the love of God, who loved us first. It is a mistake to judge and condemn a brother that sins, not because one does not want to recognize the sin, but because to condemn the sinner breaks the bond of fraternity with him and scorns God's mercy, who, instead, does not want to give up on any of His children. We do not have the power to condemn our brother who errs; we are not above him: instead we have the duty to restore him to the dignity of a child of the Father and to accompany him on his journey of conversion.

To His Church, to us, Jesus indicates a second pillar: "give." To forgive is the first pillar; to give is the second pillar. "Give, and it will be given to you [...]"

For the measure you give will be the measure you get back” (v. 38). God gives well beyond our merits, but He will be even more generous with all those who on earth were generous. Jesus does not say what will happen to those that do not give, but the image of the “measure” constitutes an admonition: with the measure of love we give, it is we ourselves who decide how we will be judged, how we will be loved. If we look well there is a coherent logic: in the measure that one receives from God, one gives to a brother, and in the measure in which one gives to a brother, one receives from God!

Therefore, merciful love is the only way to go. How much need we all have of being more merciful, of not running down others, of not judging, of not “plucking” others with criticisms, envies and jealousies. We must forgive, be merciful, live our life in love. This love enables Jesus’ disciples to not lose the identity received from Him, and to recognize themselves as children of the same Father. Thus, in the love they practice in life, that Mercy is reverberated that will have no end (cf. 1 Corinthians 13:1-12). But do not forget this: mercy and gift; forgiveness and gift, thus the heart widens, it widens in love. Instead, egoism and anger render the heart small, which hardens like a stone. What do you prefer, a heart of stone or a heart full of love? If you prefer a heart full of love, be merciful!

[Original text: Italian] [Translation by ZENIT]

In Italian

I give a warm welcome to the Italian-speaking pilgrims. I am happy to receive the faithful of the Dioceses of Asqui, Grosseto, Nola, Sessa Aurunca and Tortona, accompanied by their respective Bishops, and the Major Inter-Diocesan Seminary of Udine, Trieste and Gorizia, accompanied by the Archbishop, Monsignor Mazzocato: I hope that the Jubilee pilgrimage and the crossing of the Holy Door will nourish faith in you, give new impetus to hope and render charity fruitful with ever more earnest attention to the needs of needy brothers.

I greet the participants in the course promoted by the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross; the Municipal Council of Taranto with the Archbishop, Monsignor Santoro; the directors of the Houses of Divine Providence of Italy and the Montfort Missionaries, observing the third centenary of the birth in Heaven of their founder, Saint Louis Marie de Montfort. May the visit to the Tombs of the Apostles foster in all the sense of belonging to the ecclesial family.

A special greeting goes to young people, the sick and newlyweds. Today is the feast of Saint Matthew, Apostle and Evangelist. May his conversion be an example to you, dear young people, to live life with the criteria of the faith; may his meekness sustain you, dear sick, when your suffering seems unbearable; and may his following of the Savior remind you, dear newlyweds, of the importance of prayer in the matrimonial itinerary you have undertaken.

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The Holy Father's Appeal

Observed today is the 23rd World Alzheimer's Day, whose theme is "Remember Me." I invite all those present to "remember" with Mary's solicitude and the merciful Jesus' tenderness all those who are affected by this disease and their families, to have them feel our closeness. We also pray for persons who are at the side of the sick, able to take up their needs, including the most imperceptible, because they are seen with eyes full of love.