



(ZENIT, Vatican City, October 12, 2016).- Receiving God's mercy is not enough, we also have to be a "sign and instrument" of mercy for others, says Pope Francis. And "mercy is not reserved only for particular moments, but it embraces the whole of our daily existence."

The Pope said this today during his address at the general audience, in which he continued his catechesis on the theme of mercy as the jubilee nears its end.

"How, then, can we be witnesses of mercy?" the Holy Father asked.

It's nothing complicated, he answered, saying it's about simple gestures that have great value in God's eyes — "to the point that He said to us that it is on these that we will be judged."

"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," the Pope said. "The Church has called these gestures '*corporal works of mercy,*' because they help persons in their material needs."

He continued: "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."

Indifference

The Pope said future catecheses will consider these works of mercy, which have given "genuine witness of the faith" down through the centuries.

"In a world stricken, unfortunately, by the virus of indifference, the works of

mercy are the best antidote,” he said. “In fact, they educate us to pay attention to the most elementary needs of our ‘least brothers.’”

“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.”

Francis cited St. Augustine’s phrase, “Timeo Iesum transeuntem,” saying “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 an encounter with Him.”

Here is a ZENIT working translation of Pope Francis’ prepared address during this morning’s general audience in St. Peter’s Square.

THE HOLY FATHER’S CATECHESIS

Dear Brothers and Sisters, good morning!

In preceding catecheses we entered a little in the great mystery of God’s mercy. We meditated on the Father’s action in the Old Testament and then, through evangelical accounts, we saw how Jesus is the incarnation of Mercy in His words and in His gestures. He, in turn, taught His disciples: “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful” (*Luke 6:36*). It is a commitment that challenges the conscience and action of every Christian. In fact, it is not enough to experience God’s mercy in one’s life; it is necessary that whoever receives it becomes also a sign and instrument of it for others. Moreover, mercy is not reserved only for particular moments, but it embraces the whole of our daily existence.

How, then, 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, 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 patiently annoying persons.” 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.

In the forthcoming catecheses we will pause on these works, which the Church presents 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 are in need of our help. We do not have to go in search, who knows, of endeavors 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: “*Timeo Iesum transeuntem*” (*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 an encounter with Him.

The works of mercy awaken in us the exigency 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 to him his/her dignity. How many abandoned children she held in her arms; how many dying, 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.

[Original text: Italian] [Translation by ZENIT]

In Italian

Dear Italian-speaking pilgrims, welcome! I am happy to receive the faithful of the Dioceses of Cremona, Piacenza, Anagni-Alatri and Conversano-Monopoli, accompanied by their respective Pastors, and I exhort them to draw fruit from the Jubilee we are celebrating, to be heralds of the Gospel with a consistent witness of life. I greet the Sisters of Saint Elizabeth, gathered here on the occasion of their General Chapter, and I hope that the foundational charism is rediscovered in the perspective of Divine Mercy. I greet the young people of the Folklore Festival of Cori; the participants in the European Conference of Christian Radios and the *Saint Rita Work* Foundation of Prato with the Bishop, Monsignor Franco Agostinelli. May the crossing of the Holy Door be an act of personal and communal faith, and stimulate all to exercise the works of mercy in their own environments.

A special greeting goes to the organizers and participants in the "Match for Peace and Solidarity," which will be held this evening in the Olympic Stadium, promoted by *Scholas Occurrentes*, the Love and Liberty Community, the Italian Spots Center and UNITALSI.

Finally, a greeting goes to young people, the sick and newlyweds. Yesterday we celebrated the Memorial of Saint John XXIII. Dear young people, invoke his heavenly intercession to imitate the gentleness of his paternal love; pray to him in moments of the cross and of suffering, dear sick, to face difficulties with his same meekness; learn from him, dear newlyweds, the art of educating children with tenderness and with example.

[Original text: Italian] [Translation by ZENIT]

The Holy Father's Appeals

Tomorrow, October 13, is the *International Day for the Reduction of Natural Disasters*, which this year proposes the topic: "Reduce Mortality." In fact, natural disasters could be avoided or at least limited, because their effects are often due to the lack of care of the environment on man's part. Therefore, I encourage the joining of forces in a farsighted way in the protection of our

common home, promoting a culture of prevention, also with the help of new knowledge, reducing the risks for the most vulnerable populations.

[Original text: Italian] [Translation by ZENIT]

I wish to stress and confirm my closeness to all the victims of the inhuman conflict in Syria. It is with a sense of urgency that I renew my appeal, imploring those responsible with all my strength, to provide an immediate cease-fire, which is imposed and respected at least for the necessary time to make possible the evacuation of civilians, especially children, who are trapped again under bloody bombardments.

[Original text: Italian] [Translation by ZENIT]