



The Holy See

EXTRAORDINARY JUBILEE OF MERCY

**CATECHESIS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
FOR ALL WORKERS OF MERCY AND VOLUNTEERS**

*Saint Peter's Square
Saturday, 3 September 2016*

[Multimedia]

We have just heard the hymn to love which the Apostle Paul wrote for the Community in Corinth, and which constitutes one of the most beautiful and demanding texts for our witness of faith (cf. *1 Cor 13:1-13*). How often Saint Paul spoke of love and faith in his letters; and here too we are given something exceedingly grand and original. He states that, unlike faith and hope, love “never ends” (v. 8): it lasts for ever. This teaching must be for us an unshakable certainty; the love of God will never diminish in our lives or in human history. It is a love which remains forever *youthful, active, dynamic* and which has an attraction beyond all telling. It is a *faithful* love that does not betray, despite our fickleness. It is a *fruitful* love which generates and surpasses our laziness. We are witnesses to this love. The love of God, truly, comes towards us; it is like a swelling river that engulfs us without overwhelming us. Quite the contrary is true: “[If I] have not love, I am nothing”, says Saint Paul (v. 2). The more we allow ourselves to be taken up by this love, the more our life will be renewed. We should say with all our being: *I am loved, therefore I exist!*

The love of which the Apostle speaks is not something abstract or vague; rather, it is a love that *is seen, touched, and experienced* first hand. The greatest and most expressive form of this love is Jesus. His entire person and his life are nothing other than the concrete revelation of the Father’s love, reaching its highest expression on the Cross: “God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us” (*Rom 5:8*). This is love! They are not just words; this is love. From Calvary, where the suffering of God’s Son reaches its culmination, the source of love flows, a love that wipes away all sin and transforms everything into new life. We always have indelibly within us, this certainty of faith: Christ “loved me and gave himself for me” (*Gal 2:20*). Of this we

are very certain: Christ loved me, and gave himself for me, for you, for all, for every one of us! Nothing and no one can ever separate us from the love of God (cf. *Rom 8:35-39*). Love, therefore, is the highest expression of life; it allows us to exist!

Before this essential truth of our faith, the Church can never allow herself to act as that priest and Levite who ignored the man half dead at the side of the road (cf. *Lk 10:25-36*). She cannot look away and turn her back on the many forms of poverty that cry out for mercy. This turning one's back in order not to see hunger, sickness, exploited persons... this is a grave sin! It is also a modern sin, a sin of our times! We Christians cannot allow ourselves to do this. It is not worthy of the Church nor of any Christian to "pass by on the other side", and to pretend to have a clean conscience simply because we have said our prayers or because we have been to Mass on Sunday. No. Calvary is always real; it has not disappeared at all, nor does it remain with us merely as a nice painting in our churches. That culmination of compassion, from which the love of God flows to our human misery, still speaks to us today and spurs us on to offer ever new signs of mercy. I will never tire of saying that the mercy of God is not some beautiful idea, but rather a concrete action. There is no mercy without being concrete. Mercy is not doing good "in passing", but getting involved where there is something wrong, where there is illness, where there is hunger, wherever there is exploitation. And even human mercy is not authentic – that is, human and merciful – until it has attained tangible expression in the actions of our daily life. The warning of the Apostle John has perennial value: "Little children, let us not love in word and speech but in deed and truth" (*1 Jn 3:18*). The truth of mercy, is expressed in our daily gestures that make God's action visible in our midst.

Brothers and sisters, you represent the large and varied world of voluntary workers. You are among the most precious things the Church has, you who every day, often silently and unassumingly, give shape and visibility to mercy. You are *crafters of mercy*: with your hands, with your eyes, with your hearing, with your closeness, by your touch... craftsmen! You express one of the most noble desires of the human heart, making a suffering person feel loved. In the different contexts of need of so many people, your presence is the hand of Christ held out to all, and reaching all. You are the hand of Christ held out: have you thought about this? The credibility of the Church is also conveyed in a convincing way through your service to abandoned children, to the sick, the poor who lack food or work, to the elderly, the homeless, prisoners, refugees and immigrants, to all struck by natural disasters... Indeed, wherever there is a cry for help, there your active and selfless witness is found. In bearing one another's burdens, you make Christ's law visible (cf. *Gal 6:2; Jn 13:34*). Dear brothers and sisters, you touch the flesh of Christ with your hands: do not forget this. You touch the flesh of Christ with your hands. Be always ready to offer solidarity, to be steadfast in your closeness to others, determined in awakening joy and genuine in giving comfort. The world stands in need of concrete signs of solidarity, especially as it is faced with the temptation to indifference. It requires persons who, by their lives, defy such individualism, which is the tendency to think only of oneself and to ignore the brother or sister in need. Be always happy and full of joy in the service you give, but never presume to think that you are superior to

others. Instead, let your work of mercy be a humble and eloquent continuation of Jesus' presence who continues to bend down to our level to take care of the ones who suffer. For love "builds up" (1 Cor 8:1), day after day helping our communities to be signs of fraternal communion.

And speak to the Lord about these things. Call on him. Do as Sister Preyma did, as Sister has told us: she knocked on the door of the tabernacle. So much courage! The Lord hears us: call on him! Lord, look at this... Look at all this poverty, this indifference, this turning one's back: "This does not affect me; this is not important to me". Speak about this to the Lord: "Lord, why? Lord, why? Why am I so weak and yet you call me to give this service?" Help me, and give me strength, and make me humble" At the heart of mercy is this dialogue with the merciful heart of Jesus.

Tomorrow we will have the joy of seeing Mother Teresa proclaimed a saint. She deserves it! This witness to mercy in our time will join the vast array of men and women who, by their holiness of life, have made the love of Christ visible. Let us also imitate their example, as we ask to be humble instruments in God's hands in order to alleviate the world's sufferings, and to share the joy and hope of the resurrection. Thank you.

And before giving you my blessing, I invite you all to pray in silence for the many, many people who suffer; for so much suffering, for all who are discarded by society. Pray also for the many volunteers like you, who go out to encounter the flesh of Christ, to touch it, to care for it, to be close to it. And pray for the many, many who in the face of all this poverty simply turn their backs and who hear in their hearts a voice which says: "This does not affect me, this is not important to me". Let us pray in silence.

[silence]

And now let us turn to Our Lady: *Hail, Mary...*

[Blessing]