



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE **BOLLETTINO**

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BIURO PRASOWE STOLICY APOSTOLSKIEJ دار الصحافة التابعة للكرسي الرسولي

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The Holy Father dedicated the catechesis of his Wednesday general audience, held in St. Peter's Square, to two works of mercy: visiting the sick and the imprisoned. "The life of Jesus, especially in the three years of His public ministry, was a ceaseless encounter with the people. Among these, a special place was occupied by the sick. How many pages of the Gospels narrate these encounters! The paralytic, the blind man, the leper, the possessed, the epileptic, and innumerable people with every type of sickness. ... Jesus made Himself close to every one of them and healed them with His presence and the power of his regenerating force. Therefore, visiting and assisting the sick cannot be excluded from the works of mercy".

To this work, he added that of being close to those who are in prison, who have in common with the sick a condition that limits their freedom, the value of which we become aware of only when it is missing. "Jesus gave us the possibility of being free despite the limits of illness and reclusion. He offers us the freedom that comes from the encounter with Him, and from the new meaning that this encounter gives to our personal condition".

With these works of mercy, the Lord invites us to perform a gesture of great humanity: sharing. "Those who are ill often feel alone", the Pope observed. "We cannot hide the fact that, especially in our times, it is precisely in illness that we have the deepest experience of loneliness, that runs through a great part of our life. A visit can make the sick person feel less alone, and a little company is an excellent medicine. A smile, a caress and a handshake are simple gestures, but very important for those who feel they are abandoned to themselves. How many people dedicate themselves to visiting the sick in hospitals and in their homes! It is an invaluable voluntary commitment. When it is done in the name of the Lord, it then also becomes an eloquent and effective expression of mercy. Let us not leave sick people alone! Let us not prevent them from finding relief, and us from being enriched by closeness to those who suffer. Hospitals are true 'cathedrals of pain', where however the strength of the charity that sustains and feels compassion is made evident".

"I think the same of those who are closed away in prison", he continued. "Jesus does not forget them either. By including visiting the imprisoned among the works of mercy, He wished to invite us, first and foremost, not to judge anyone. Certainly, if one is in prison it is because he has made a mistake, he has not respected the law or civil co-existence. Therefore, in prison, he is serving his sentence. But whatever a prisoner may have done, he is still beloved by God. Who can enter into the intimacy of his conscience to understand what he feels? Who can understand his pain and remorse? It is too easy to wash one's hands, stating simply that he has made a

mistake. A Christian is called instead to take responsibility, so that he who has made a mistake is able to understand the error of his ways and return to himself. The lack of freedom is without doubt one of the worst deprivations for the human being. If to this we add degradation due to the often inhuman conditions in which these people find themselves living, then it becomes the case in which a Christian feels called upon to do everything possible to restore their dignity to them”.

“Visiting people in prison is a work of mercy that, especially nowadays, assumes a special value due to the different forms of justicialism to which we are submitted. Therefore, may no-one point the finger at another”, stressed the Holy Father. “On the contrary, let us be instruments of mercy, with an attitude of sharing and respect”.

Francis revealed that he thinks often of those who are in prison: “I hold them in my heart”, he said, “and I ask myself what has led them to delinquency, and how they have been able to give in to the different forms of evil. And yet, along with these thoughts I feel that they are all in need of closeness and tenderness, because God’s mercy can work wonders. How many tears I have seen on the cheeks of prisoners who have perhaps never before wept in their lives, just because they felt they were listened to and loved. And let us not forget that Jesus and the apostles also experienced imprisonment. In the accounts of the Passion we learn of the suffering that the Lord was subjected to: He was captured, dragged like a criminal, derided, whipped, crowned with thorns. He, the only Innocent one! Saints Peter and Paul were also incarcerated”.

In this regard, Francis commented that last Sunday, during the Jubilee of Prisoners, he was visited by a group of detainees from Northern Italy. When he asked them what they would do the following day, before returning to Padua, they replied that they would visit the Mamertino jail to share the experience of St. Paul. “It was beautiful to hear this”, he said. “These prisoners wanted to visit Paul, the prisoner. ... The pages of the Acts of the Apostles in which Paul’s imprisonment is described are moving. He felt alone and wished only for his friends to visit him. He felt alone because the great majority of his friends had left him alone, the great Paul”.

“As we can see, these works of mercy are ancient and yet they always remain valid. Jesus left what He was doing to go and visit Peter’s mother-in-law, an ancient work of charity. Let us not fall into indifference, but instead let us become instruments of God’s mercy!”, the Pope exclaimed at the end of his catechesis. “We can all be instruments of God’s mercy and this will do more good to us than to the others, as mercy always passes through a gesture, a word, a visit, and this mercy is an act to restore joy and dignity to those who have lost it”.
