

Misericordiae Vultus

How do we live mercy in our communities?

COMMUNITIES FOUNDED ON MERCY

At the moment of receiving the monastic habit, the Abbot poses the question : “What do you ask?” In the Congregation of Solesmes, the candidate replies : “The mercy of God and admission into your community.” In an even more sober manner, the postulants of the Charterhouse reply: “Mercy”. The monk is one who is athirst for mercy. The monastic life creates in him an ever greater thirst to receive and give mercy.

The Rule allows the giving of a realistic response to the Gospel call to perfection. This response is possible thanks to divine mercy. *Per ducatum Evangelii* (Pr.21), the monk settles gradually into a full confidence and an indestructible hope in the mercy of God : *De Dei misericordia, numquam desperari* (RB 4.74)

He receives it from the Abbot who *semper superexaltet misericordiam iudicio* (RB 64.10). He is the one who is good shepherd and doctor, attentive to his public faults (RB 27-28), and humbly welcomes the confession of his shortcomings (RB 7. 44-48)

He receives it from the community who supports with extreme patience, his weaknesses, both moral and physical (RB72.5). He is assured of the care and support of spiritual elders who know how to heal their wounds and those of others (RB 46. 5-6) and to console, by good *senpectae* ,the brothers who are on the wrong track(RB27.2) The prayer of all is the most efficacious remedy for his spiritual wounds.(RB28.4-5)

He receives it from the Rule which looks with mercy towards the young and the old, the sick and the weak of all sorts, as well as on a variety of temperaments and needs.

At the same time, he doesn't cease to give it to the Abbot, to his brothers and to all those who come to the monastery. He implores it of God through constant prayer, in tears of compunction (RB 20.3) and with the cries of the Psalms.

His whole life is an encounter with mercy which relieves him from feeling himself condemned to the terrible judgement of God and allows him to enter into that perfect charity which chases away fear(RB 7.64-66), thus making possible the expansion of the heart in the good zeal of love(Pr 49; RB 72).

In the person of guests, especially the poorest, seeking the mercy of welcome, the whole community receives the mercy of God (RB 53.14 : *Suscepimus Deus, misericordiam tuam, in medio temple tui*). Mercy reaches out to them – as in the person of the sick – its true nature making a reciprocal exchange(cf. Saint John Paul II, *Dives in Misericordia*).

Mercy is the foundation of the life of monastic communities, as it is the life of the whole Church (MV10). Forgiveness, compassion, hospitality and the patience of charity are the substance of community life. It is in the climate of mercy that the true faces of God are revealed to the monk, both to others and himself.

TO CONTEMPLATE AND CELEBRATE MERCY

“We always have need **to contemplate the mystery of mercy**. It is the source of joy, of serenity and of peace. It is the condition of our salvation. Mercy is the word which reveals the mystery of the Holy Trinity. Mercy is the ultimate and supreme act through which God comes to meet us. Mercy, is the fundamental law which lives in the heart of each person when he casts a sincere look at the brother that he encounters on the way of life. Mercy, is the path that unites God and man, so that he opens his heart to the hope of being loved always in spite of the limitations of our sin.”

Mercy is proposed to us again by the Church, in this Holy Year, as the divine attribute capable of unifying our contemplation of God in Christ. It illuminates the interior and unifies *Lectio Divina*, the prayer of the heart, the singing of the Psalms, the celebration and adoration of the Eucharist, the prayer of the Rosary and other forms of devotion. All these practices are aimed at the acquisition of

the merciful gaze of the Father on ourselves, on members of the community, and on all people. The fruit of contemplation is merciful charity.

PRACTISING MERCY

“It is my burning desire that, during this Jubilee, the Christian people may reflect on the *corporal and spiritual works of mercy*. It will be a way to reawaken our conscience, too often grown dull in the face of poverty. And let us enter more deeply into the heart of the Gospel where the poor have a special experience of God’s mercy. Jesus introduces us to these works of mercy in his preaching so that we can know whether or not we are living as his disciples. Let us rediscover these *corporal works of mercy*: to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, heal the sick, visit the imprisoned, and bury the dead. And let us not forget the *spiritual works of mercy*: to counsel the doubtful, instruct the ignorant, admonish sinners, comfort the afflicted, forgive offences, bear patiently those who do us ill, and pray for the living and the dead.” MV 15

In conformity with RB 4, the monk is asked to practise consistently all the works of mercy, both within the life of the community and in relation to the outside world. It may be noted as well:

- the care of the sick and the elderly monks, more numerous in ageing Western communities;
- mutual forgiveness and support;
- the relationship with those brothers whose way is marked by more or less serious misconduct;
- the welcome given to guests in their diversity;
- spiritual counselling and the ministry of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation;
- all forms of catechesis, education and preaching;
- constant prayer for the needs of the Church of the world, and for the faithful departed

TO LIVE MERCY

“Jesus affirms that mercy is not only an action of the Father, it becomes a criterion for ascertaining who his true children are. In short, we are called to show mercy because mercy has first been shown to us. Pardoning offences becomes the clearest expression of merciful love, and for us Christians it is an imperative from which we cannot excuse ourselves. At times how hard it seems to forgive! And yet pardon is the instrument placed into our fragile hands to attain serenity of heart. To let go of anger, wrath, violence, and revenge are necessary conditions to living joyfully. Let us therefore heed the Apostle’s exhortation: “Do not let the sun go down on your anger” (*Eph 4:26*). Above all, let us listen to the words of Jesus who made mercy an ideal of life and a criterion for the credibility of our faith: “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy” (*Mt 5:7*): the beatitude to which we should particularly aspire in this Holy Year. “ MV 9

Mercy is present in the whole life of the monk, and animates a dynamic of permanent conversion. Saint John Paul II spoke of mercy as the “pulse of the life of the Church”(DM) . The vow of “*Conversatio/ Conversio Morum*” places the monk in this dynamic. It produces the fruits of brotherhood on the basis of the inadmissible dignity of each person that mercy manifests and restores. The emergence of the full dignity of sonship of each brother is the horizon of the monastic life in general, and, in particular, the service of the fatherhood of the Abbot.

TO OPEN THE HEART TO THOSE WHO LIVE ON THE FRINGES

“In this Holy Year, we look forward to the experience of opening our hearts to those living on the outermost fringes of society: fringes which modern society itself creates. How many uncertain and painful situations there are in the world today! How many are the wounds borne by the flesh of those who have no voice because their cry is muffled and drowned out by the indifference of the rich! During this Jubilee, the Church will be called even more to heal these wounds, to assuage them with the oil of consolation, to bind them with mercy and cure them with solidarity and vigilant care. Let us not fall into humiliating indifference or a monotonous routine that prevents us from discovering what is new! Let us ward off destructive cynicism! Let us open

our eyes and see the misery of the world, the wounds of our brothers and sisters who are denied their dignity, and let us recognize that we are compelled to heed their cry for help! May we reach out to them and support them so they can feel the warmth of our presence, our friendship, and our fraternity! May their cry become our own, and together may we break down the barriers of indifference that too often reign supreme and mask our hypocrisy and egoism!" MV15

To open the heart is, in particular:

- to open and expand our prayer so that we are made the voice of "those who no longer have a voice because their cry has disappeared"
- to live in a poor way in order to share the fruit of our labour
- to open and expand our monastery so that it may truly be a place of welcome for the poorest
- to discern new forms of poverty(spiritual, moral, corporal, cultural, economic and political) and to try to provide a concrete answer according to our means.