



Guest of Honour Address: On "Befriending the Other"

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Abstract: Since the hallmark of Christianity is the movement towards the other, the church is also a servant of the kingdom of god, following the footsteps of Jesus Christ himself who came "not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." The church serves the kingdom by establishing communities and founding new particular churches, and by guiding them to mature faith and charity in openness toward others, in service to individuals and society, and in understanding and esteem for human institution. The church serves the kingdom by separating throughout the world the 'gospel values' which are an expression of the kingdom and which help people to accept God's plan. Then the Cardinal wishes that we reach out to the poor and support them so they can feel the warmth of our presence, our friendship, and our fraternity!

Keywords: Social teachings, human dignity, Pope Francis, solidarity with the poor.

0. Introduction: The Meaning of the Other and Its Importance for Us Christians

The hallmark of Christianity is a movement from self-centeredness to other-centeredness. As Jesus was a man for others, the central challenge of Christianity is living for others. The church, in Christ, is a sacrament -- a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of the unity of the entire

human race (*Lumen Gentium*, no.1). The church is also a servant of the kingdom of god, following the footsteps of Jesus Christ himself who came “not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10.45). The church serves the kingdom by establishing communities and founding new particular churches, and by guiding them to mature faith and charity in openness toward others, in service to individuals and society, and in understanding and esteem for human institution. The church serves the kingdom by spreading throughout the world the ‘gospel values’ which are an expression of the kingdom and which help people to accept God’s plan.¹

One of the key achievements of the Second Vatican council was to give importance to the image of the church as the people of god. The church serves the people of god in its struggle for the liberation of the oppressed and in search for justice and peace. Dietrich Bonhoeffer defined the church as the communion that exists for others, he emphasized that the church “must share in the secular problems of ordinary human life, not dominating but helping and serving”². As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)* teaches us, collaboration among Christians in various areas of service to humankind is essential to the following of Christ.³ It affirms that “in economic matters, respect for human dignity requires the practice of the virtue of temperance, to moderate our attachment to the goods of this world: of the virtue of justice to preserve our neighbor’s rights and to render what is his or her due and of solidarity following the golden Rule and in keeping with the generosity of the Lord who ‘though He was rich yet for your sake became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich (2 Cor 8:9)’”⁴.

Redemptoris Missio succinctly states that “the Church’s mission derives not only from the Lord’s mandate but also from the profound demands of God’s life within us. Those

who are incorporated in the Catholic Church ought to sense their privilege and for that very reason their greater obligation of bearing witness to the faith and to the Christian life as a service to their brothers and sisters and as a fitting response to God. They should be ever mindful that “they owe their distinguished status not to their own merits but to Christ’s special grace; and if they fail to respond to this grace in thought, word and deed, not only will they not be served, they will be judged severely.”⁵

1. Scriptural Understanding of the Other

In 1987 at Xavier University in New Orleans, St. John Paul II stated that it is not enough to offer to the disadvantaged of the world crumbs of freedom, crumbs of oneself to reject introversion and to concentrate on the needs of others. For example, the parable of the rich man and the poor man is directed to the conscience of humanity (cf. Luke 16:19ff) and, today in particular, to the conscience of the developed nations and rich countries and rich people.⁶ The rich man was consumed in self-centered living and only cared about himself. He had no concern and compassion for the poor and hence he was condemned. Christ demands our concern and compassion on the poor and hence he was condemned. Christ demands our openness to the poor and the disadvantaged. Here, we recollect the words of St. John Paul II: “The human person lives in a community, in society. And with the community he shares hunger and thirst and sickness and malnutrition and misery and all the deficiencies that result there from. In his or her own person the human being is meant to experience the needs of others.”⁷ We need to inspire people to get involved in social concerns that will not only enlarge their horizons but will also challenge their lifestyles and encourage them to reach out to the marginalized and the weak of society.

St. John Paul II's Encyclical Letter, *Veritatis Splendour* clearly notes that "both the Old and the New Testaments explicitly affirm that without *love of neighbor*, made concrete in keeping the commandments, *genuine love of God* is not possible. St. John makes the point with extra ordinary forcefulness: "If anyone says, 'I love God', and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen" (1 Jn 4:20). The Evangelist echoes the moral preaching of Christ, expressed in a wonderful and unambiguous way in the parable of the Good Samaritan (cf. Lk 10:30-37) and in His words about the final judgment (cf. Mt 25:31-46).⁸

Jesus' Attitude to Others: The attitude of Jesus in the Gospels can be seen from his attitude, his behavior, his words and deeds. It clearly depicts a man totally for others.⁹ He was in solidarity with the least and the outcasts. He showed concern for suffering people by reaching out to them. *Veritatis Splendor* explains that "Jesus brings God's commandments to fulfillment, particularly the commandment of love of neighbor, by *interiorizing their demands and by bringing out their fullest meaning*. Love of neighbor springs from a *loving heart* which, precisely because it loves, is ready to live out the loftiest challenges. Jesus shows that the commandments must not be understood as a minimum limit not to be gone beyond, but rather as a path involving a moral and spiritual journey towards perfection, at the heart of which is love (cf. Col 3:14)."¹⁰

To live is to love. And living the Gospel of life means to live in love. The parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37) invites us to reflect upon two very important questions, viz. Who is my neighbor? And Am I my brother's keeper? It reveals to us that everyone is our neighbor, especially the ones who are living on the fringes of society and all those who are

most in need (Mt 25:40). The Good Samaritan is anyone who has compassion, stops by and helps the suffering person, and truly gives himself, his very “I” to the “Other” person. Here we focus upon one of the key points of all Christian anthropology, viz, that man cannot find himself except through a sincere gift of himself.¹¹ In this regard, St. John Paul II remarked: “We must care for the other as person for whom God has made us responsible.” He insisted that when human life is involved the service of charity must be profoundly consistent as human life is sacred and inviolable at every stage and in every situation; it is an indivisible good.¹² For St. John Paul II, the parable of the Good Samaritan is Christ’s personal call for Christians to be in solidarity with all those who suffer. And the cross of Christ is the ultimate proof of his solidarity with human beings.¹³

In the New Testament passage on the healing of the Roman Centurion’s servant (Mt 8:5-3; Lk 7:1-10), we observe that the centurion, even though he was a gentile, had tremendous faith that Jesus would heal his servant. The Centurion cared for his servant and strongly believed that Jesus could heal him with his Word. He crossed racial barriers and risked his reputation by going to a Jew for help. Jesus was amazed at his faith. Our faith must be reflected in the life we lead and the values we live by. Our life has to be transformed by what we believe. So, the principal quality that our faith should have is love. In *Lumen Fidei*, Pope Francis remarked: “Christian faith in as much as it proclaims the truth of God’s total love and opens us to the power of that love, penetrates to the core of our human experience. Each of us comes to the light because of love, and each of us is called to love in order to remain in the light.”¹⁴ The Centurion cared so much for his servant that he humbled himself to ask the help of Jesus to heal him. Mother Teresa said that she saw the face of Jesus in the face of every sick and dying person she met. May our faith in God inspire us to reach out in love especially to our less fortunate brothers and sisters.

The incident of Jesus' conversation with a Samaritan woman at the well (Jn 4: 4-26) teaches us the lesson that God loves each of us in spite of our sinful lives. No one loved her, not even herself. But Jesus befriended her. The Samaritan woman was considered an outcast by her own people was invited by Jesus to drink the water that he gives, water that gives eternal life. Christ's loving way of acting, the Gospel of his words and deeds, transformed the woman and led her to become his disciple. She then went on to proclaim Christ to the inhabitants of Samaria, and they too received him with faith.¹⁵ May Christ's love for us inspire us to reach out to every single person in faith and love and doing so reveal to them the mercy of God.

2. The Church's Love and Concern for the Other Is Seen in Its Social Teachings

The Church's social teaching is a valid instrument of evangelization (Cf. *Centesimus Annus*, no. 54) since it places the human person and society in relationship with the light of the Gospel.¹⁶ "By means of her social doctrine, the shows her concern for human life in society, aware that the quality of social life, that is, of the relationship of justice and love that form the fabric of society- depends in a decisive manner on the protection and promotion of the human person, for whom every community comes into existence."¹⁷ *The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* boldly affirms that "no legislation, no system of rules or negotiation will ever succeed in persuading men and people to live in unity, brotherhood and peace; no line of reasoning will ever be able to surpass the appeal of love. Only love can animate and shape social interaction, moving it towards peace in the context of a world that is ever more complex. In this perspective, love takes on the characteristic style of social and political charity. Social charity makes us love the common good, it makes us effectively seek the good of all people, considered not only as individuals

or private persons but also in the social dimension that unites them.”¹⁸

a. The Church's Concern for Human Work and the Working Class

According to St. John Paul, human work is the essential key to the whole social question. The Pope is keenly interested in work because he is interested in the human person. In the initial pages of the book of Genesis the Church finds the source of her conviction, that work is a fundamental dimension of human existence on earth.¹⁹ The Biblical words; “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it,” even though they do not refer directly and explicitly to work, beyond any doubt they indirectly indicate it as an activity for man to carry out in the world. Indeed, they show its very deepest essence. Man is the image of God partly through the mandate, received from his Creator to subdue, to dominate, the earth.²⁰ In carrying out this mandate, every human being reflects the very action of the Creator.²¹ Thus, we cannot understand work without understanding man, and since man was created by God, by seeing the original plan for man, we can get some insight into man's nature and purpose. In fact, human work has an ethical value of its own because of the fact that the one who is doing the work is a person. Hence, work is for the person and not the person for work.²² From all this, St. John Paul II draws out an important principle of Catholic Social Doctrine, a principle that has always been taught by the Church, viz, the principle of the priority of labour over capital. Without man and without work, things would not serve their purposes and be means to fulfill the commandment to subdue the earth.²³ To show his concern for the workers and their rights, St. Pope John Paul II defends four traditional rights of labour, viz, suitable employment for those who are capable of it, just remuneration for work done, the organization of the labour

process to respect the requirements of each person and his or her life and the right of workers to form unions.²⁴

b. Solidarity with others and Interdependence: Two Important Principles of the Church's Social Teaching

Today, more than ever the world needs solidarity as a solution to the deep seated economic and social problems. We all need to realize that we cannot live in isolation but rather in a society. In this context, Joseph Cardinal Hoffner states that the principle of the solidarity “rests on the existential reciprocal relationship and mutual involvement between the individual and society. On the other hand it denotes the moral responsibility (mutual liability) emanating from this essential condition. Hence, solidarity is both an ontological and ethical principle.”²⁵ According to Hoffner, the existence of world hunger is the greatest sign that solidarity is lacking in our world. He appeals to every nation to examine their economic and political policies in order to change those situations across frontiers so that all nations achieve economic and social progress and contribute to the welfare of all.²⁶

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in its *Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation* describes solidarity as a necessary principle and also as an obligation. It affirmed that “Solidarity is a direct requirement of human and supernatural brotherhood. The serious socio-economic problems which occur today cannot be solved unless new fronts of solidarity are created: solidarity of the poor among themselves, solidarity with the poor to which the rich are called and solidarity among the workers. Institutions and social organizations at different levels, as well as the state, must share in a general movement of solidarity. When the Church appeals for such solidarity, she is aware that she herself is concerned in a quite special way.”²⁷ It also stated that by virtue of the principle of solidarity, “man with his brothers is obliged to contribute to the common good of the society at all its levels.

Further, international solidarity is necessary not only in cases of extreme urgency but also to aid true development, to find concrete technical solutions to problems and to create a new mentality among our contemporaries.²⁸ Hence the Church's doctrine is opposed to all the forms of social and political individualism."²⁹

St John Paul II describes solidarity as "a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all."³⁰ The good of each person is bound up with the good of the community. Each person must fulfill his responsibility to achieve the common good in the light of his abilities. For the Pope, this is the essence of solidarity. For the Christian, this requires a deep Christian Maturity in which the answer to the question "Am I my brother's keeper?" is a spontaneous 'yes'.

c. The Fact of Interdependence

Requiring the Response of Solidarity: St. John Paul II sees interdependence as a challenge having a very positive potential. "The conviction is growing of a radical interdependence and consequently of the need for a solidarity which will take up interdependence and transfer it to the moral plane."³¹ Donald Dorr states that "these words are the key to understand the word *solidarity* in the specific technical meaning the Pope is giving to it: solidarity is the correct moral response to the fact of interdependence."³² The fact of interdependence is thus a necessary condition for solidarity: interdependence must be transformed in to solidarity, which is based on the principle that the goods of creation are meant for all, and that the other person is to be seen as our neighbor.³³ Solidarity should make the more powerful feel responsible for those who are weak and be ready to share with them what they have. When this moral dimension is ignored, there arises instead an attitude of an overriding desire for profit and thirst for power, which

when established on an international level are expressed in different forms of imperialism and the division of the world into blocs.³⁴ This mutual independence is an essential ingredient of justice.

***d. The Church's Concern for Other Religions:
Ongoing Dialogue Is Essential***

Nostra Aetate, the declaration on the relationship of the church to Non-Christian religions is the shortest of the Second Vatican Council's documents. However, it was the first time a Council made a positive statement to Jews, Muslims and Hindus. The declaration is a *magna carta* for dialogue. It urged Christians to acknowledge, preserve and encourage, the spiritual values and moral truths of other religions together with their social life and culture.³⁵ It revolutionized the Catholic Church's relations not only with Judaism but also with Islam and Hinduism, the major world religions. It still continues to inspire us to be faithful to the spirit of dialogue in the church. What the church needs is effective dialogue with people of other religions, which is always possible on the basis of culture. A religion without dialogue has the potential danger of alienation. St. Pope John Paul II remarked, "Dialogue is a sign of the hope that religions of the world are becoming more aware of their shared responsibility for the well-being of the human family."³⁶ Since Vatican Council II, there have been important dialogue initiatives between Christians and Jews. St. John Paul II had emphasized that the Jews are our older brothers. We remember, a reflection on the Shoah, was the first universal document of the Catholic Church dedicated to remembering the particularity of Jewish suffering in the Holocaust and the evil of the *Shoah*. It was a milestone in the journey of reconciliation with the Jews. In India 80.5 % of the population is Hindu and 13.4 % is Muslim, efforts

of inter-religious dialogue continue, however, not without challenges and difficulties.

In 1989, the CBCI Commission for Dialogue and Ecumenism brought out the '*Guidelines for Inter-religious Dialogue*', a unique document that explains dynamism of dialogue. The Commission elaborates also the attitudes for genuine dialogue. They are prayer, commitment to faith, willingness to change, truthfulness, honesty, humility, spirit of forgiveness, knowledge of the other and sense of justice.³⁷

Such dialogue is not only limited to religions. St. John Paul II also stated that "science can purify religion from error and superstition; religion can purify science idolatry and false absolutes. Each draws the other into a wider world, a world in which both can flourish."³⁸ Today, the need for an effective and constructive dialogue between modern science and religion is all the more important. We need to constantly search for creative expressions of inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue in our Church institutions such as peace meals, sports for peace and seminars on common social issues including food, water, environment and healthcare.³⁹

e. The Church's Respect for the Freedom of the Other and Respect for Human Rights:

Blessed Pope Paul VI called the "Declaration on Religious Freedom," *Dignitatis Humane*, as one of the major texts of the Council.⁴⁰ It soon emerged as one of the most influential documents created by the Council. It recognized the human right to religious liberty. It advocated for the principle of religious liberty to be treated as a civil right and obligated governments to protect this right. The fact is the right to religious freedom has already been accepted and affirmed by the common consciousness of human kind."⁴¹ It is not only a civil and political right, but is "a cornerstone in the structure

of human rights and the most profound expression of the freedom of conscience.”⁴²

St. John Paul II repeatedly stated that the dignity of the human person is the pivot on which the entirety of Catholic social doctrine turns. He said that “religious freedom is an essential requirement of the dignity of every person, a cornerstone of the structure of human rights, and for this reason an irreplaceable factor in the good of individuals and of the whole society. The freedom of individuals and communities to profess and practice their religion is an essential requirement for peaceful coexistence.”⁴³ The teaching of the Second Vatican Council clearly states that religious freedom is inseparable from human rights. Hence, the Church’s demand for religious freedom is to be seen in the wider context of the church being a champion of all human rights, since all human rights belong to all people. By the time the Council passed the Declaration on Religious Freedom in December 1965, over a hundred countries including India had made provisions for this right in their respective laws. The Church has the duty to demand for the religious freedom of every person in every country.⁴⁴ In light of the continuing attacks on the dignity of the human person through rampant abortion, euthanasia and religious persecution, it is becoming all the more necessary to return to the text of *Dignitatis Humanae*.

The United Nation’s documents too indicate that this right to religious freedom is universal. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes the inherent dignity and equal and inalienable rights of all the members of the human family. Article 18 states the right to Religious Freedom clearly. On 25 March 2011 the United Nations’ Human Rights Council has adopted a resolution recognizing freedom of religious belief and abandoning a longstanding concept of religious “defamation.” According to a recent survey by Pew Research Center, India is among the countries that have highest support

for religious freedom, with eight out of ten Indians believing that it is very important to have the freedom to practice their faith compared to a global median of 74 %.⁴⁵ It is one thing to desire religious freedom; it is another to experience it in day to day life. The journey to freedom of religion is long and arduous, but we must not give up. A process of Conscientization and dialogue are the key to change and transformation.

f. Befriending the Environment

According to the new research performed by an international team of researchers, human beings are “eating away at our own life support systems” at a rate unseen in the past 10,000 years by degrading land and freshwater systems, emitting greenhouse gasses and releasing vast amounts of agricultural chemicals into the environment. Out of nine worldwide processes that support life on Earth, four have exceeded “safe” levels, viz., human-driven climate change, loss of biosphere integrity, land system change and the high level of phosphorus and nitrogen flowing into the oceans.⁴⁶ In the light of this environmental degradation, Pope Francis in his recent Encyclical, *Laudato Si*, is guiding the Church to watchfulness for an urgent, “sign of the times.” He is reminding us of the beauty of Creation and our Dignity as its stewards entrusted by the Creator to nurture and protect that creation for the sake of our whole human family and for generations to come. As the human family strives to recalibrate its relationship to the environment, the Church has an important role to play.

The earlier Popes too showed their concern for nature and care for the environment. In 1971 in his apostolic letter marking the 80th anniversary of the publication of *Rerum novarum*. Bl. Paul VI prophetically remarked: “the Christians must turn to these new perceptions in order to take on responsibility, together with the rest of men, for a destiny which from now on is shared by all.” The new perceptions indicated by the Pope are those of a “wide-ranging social problem that concerns the

entire human family” and were addressed in the paragraph entitled *The Environment*.⁴⁷ St. John Paul II was the first Pope to talk about the consequences of industrial growth, massive urban concentrations and vastly increased energy needs in his Encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, stating that “one must take into account the nature of each being and of its mutual connection in an ordered system, which is precisely the cosmos.”⁴⁸ At the end of the 1980s the Pope warned of using natural resources, some of which are not renewable, as if they were inexhaustible, and, furthermore in industrialization, he saw a risk of contaminating the environment and of the quality of life.⁴⁹

Each and every one of us needs to respect and protect the environment, so that through nature people can “contemplate the mystery of the greatness and love of God.” Also, according to the principle of justice, each of us has a moral responsibility to protect the natural order. The growing environmental crisis in the recent years is posing a great challenge to Asia. There is a greater awareness today that the goods of the earth cannot be used as it was unfortunately used in the past. Many countries, states and people are consuming the very earth on which our very livelihood depends. The growing phenomenon of climate change and natural disasters call into question our use of the earth’s resources. One of the biggest challenges in reducing poverty and environmental degradation is neither scientific nor technological, “but rather within our minds and hearts.”⁵⁰ Blessed Pope Paul VI in *Populorum Progressio* asserts that “the whole of creation is ordered in the first place towards its creator and the rationality of humans is directed not to using nature in a thoughtless way but to recognition of God’s plan and thus to the ‘prior God-given purpose’ of nature.”⁵¹

The ruthless exploitation of earth’s resources may benefit a few people but has adverse effects on the masses in Asia. The absolute thirst for profits over the dignity of the human

person and unbridled technological development divorced from integral human development are the root causes that are alienating us from our natural environment. In his 1900 World Day of Peace Message, Saint Pope John Paul II affirms that the ecological crisis is “a profound moral crisis of which the destruction of the environment is only one troubling aspect.”⁵² In this regard he urged that we must go to the heart of the ecological degradation. St John Paul II advocated an education in ecological responsibility because “we are all really responsible for all.”⁵³

g. Solidarity with the Poor

After stating that poor countries lack the economic means either to gain access to existing sources of non-renewable energy or to finance research into new alternatives, Pope Benedict XVI then urged the international community to find institutional means of regulating the exploitation of non-renewable resources of these poor countries. He also called for a worldwide redistribution of energy resources.⁵⁴ In his encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate*, he expressed the hope that the international community and individual governments will succeed in countering harmful ways of treating the environment. The covenant between human beings and the environment should mirror the creative love of God, from whom we come and towards whom we are journeying.⁵⁵ Respect for nature and respect for human life are inextricably related. Pope Benedict XVI clearly stated that individuals in rich countries must change their life styles and their consumption with responsibility if the world's resources are to be protected. “The ecological crisis,” St. John Paul II stated, “reveals the urgent moral need for a new solidarity, especially in relations between the developing nations and those that are highly industrialized” (EC, no. 10). Only with sustainable development (which includes sustainable food, water and basic sanitation)⁵⁶ the developing nations curb the continuing

environmental degradation and avoid the destructive effects of the kind of development that has used natural resources irresponsibly. The ecological problem is closely connected to those who are poor and hence treated unjustly. According to St. Pope John Paul II, “the goods of the earth, which in the divine plan should be a common patrimony, often risk becoming the monopoly of a few who often spoil it and, sometimes destroy it, thereby creating a loss for all humanity.”⁵⁷ The option for the poor is rooted in the Gospel and in the Church’s social teaching. It awakens our conscience to the fact that the poor suffer most directly from environment decline and often have the least access to relief from their suffering. Justice is rooted in compassion for our own weakest members.⁵⁸

Pope Francis in his Encyclical *Laudato Si’* asks a very pertinent question, viz. “what kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?” (*Laudato Si’*, No.160). At the general audience April 22 2015, the day on which *Earth Day* was celebrated, Pope Francis said: “I urge all to look at the world through the eyes of the creator: the Earth is an environment to protect and a garden to cultivate. May the relationship between man and nature not be driven by greed, to manipulate and exploit, but may the divine harmony between beings and creation be conserved in the logic of respect and care, so as to be placed at the service of brothers and sisters, of future generations as well.”

3. The Challenge of Peace Today in the Light of Terrorism

During the last few days the newspapers and journals are flooded with analysis and comments of the terrorist attacks that took place on 13 November in Paris. 129 innocent people have lost their lives and hundreds of others were wounded. Earlier, on 31 October, the downing of a Russian airliner in

Egypt's Sinai Peninsula killed all the 224 people on board. Unfortunately radical terrorism and increasing terrorist threats have been on the increase around the world. According to the Global Terrorism Index (edition of 2014) from the institute for Economics and Peace, the world has experienced 61 % increase in terrorist attacks in the last year.⁵⁹ About 17,958 people were killed in terrorist attacks last year, and of those deaths 82 % occurred in just 5 nations: Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nigeria, and Syria.⁶⁰ The compendium of the Social Doctrine of the church boldly states that "terrorism is one of the most brutal forms of violence traumatizing the international community today: it sows hatred, death, and an urge for revenge and reprisal... The fight against terrorism presupposes the moral duty to help to create those conditions that will prevent it from arising in the future,"⁶¹ years ago. The challenge we are confronted with today is how we promote the common good of all and in particular the good of the other when the other violently attacks us with terror, suicide bombing and the like. We face the Christian challenge of loving one's enemies and recognizing the humanity of all those who want to destroy us. Here we recollect the words of Bl Pope Paul VI who stated: "if you want peace work for justice." The road to peace is a very long and difficult journey. Let us work together with people of all religions and cultures and search for long-term political, economic and social strategies that will result in the creation of a peaceful society. "The promotion of peace in the world is an integral part of the Church's mission of continuing Christ's work of redemption on earth."⁶²

4. Conclusion: The Teachings of Pope Francis on Befriending the Other

A few days after his election as Pope, Pope Francis set forth his vision in the clearest possible terms: "And how I would like a church that is poor and for the poor." (*E como Vorrei una chiesa povera e per i poveri*).⁶³ According to him focusing

on poverty and sacrificing for the poor are at the heart of the Gospel.⁶⁴ In his homily at Lampedusa, he lamented what he called the anesthesia of the heart: “We are a society which has forgotten how to weep, how to experience compassion”- “suffering with” others; the globalization of indifference has taken from us the ability to weep!⁶⁵ In explaining the need to reach out to the other, in *Evangelii Gaudium* he aptly remarked: “Each Christian and every community must discern the path that the Lord points out, but all of us are asked to obey his call to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the “peripheries” in need of the light of the Gospel.”⁶⁶ In his speech to the United States Congress he clearly tells its members that “the fight against poverty and hunger must be fought constantly and on many fronts.”⁶⁷

Misericordiae Vultus, the Papal Bull of Pope Francis, is a beautiful invitation to each one of us to contemplate on the mystery of mercy and to rediscover the joy that comes from the encounter with the tenderness of God’s mercy. It demonstrates to us how we are to relate to others. According to him, mercy is the bridge that connects God and man, opening our hearts to a hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness. Especially in this Holy Year of Mercy, he invites each of us to open our hearts to others, in a spirit of mercy. He emphasized: “We look forward to the experience of opening our hearts to those living on the outermost fringes of society: fringes 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.”⁶⁸

I would like to conclude my reflection today with the words of Pope Francis: “May the balm of mercy reach everyone, both believers and those far away, as a sign that the kingdom of God is already present in our midst.” His response to the other, especially to those on the fringes of society is heartwarming.

He wrote: “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!”⁶⁹

Notes

1. St. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, No. 20.
2. Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (New York, Macmillan, 1967), p.204.
3. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) no.821 and *Unitatis Redintegratio*, no.12.
4. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) no.2407.
5. St. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, No.11.
6. St. John Paul II, *Address at Xavier University in New Orleans at a meeting with Representatives of Catholic Universities on the occasion of Apostolic Visit to the USA and Canada*, 12 September 1987, no.8.9.
7. St. John Paul II, *Homily in Edmonton, Alberta*, 17 September 1984.
8. St. John Paul II, *Encyclical Letter, Veritatis Splendor*, no. 14.
9. St. John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*, no. 8 (and *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 22) “For, by his Incarnation, he, the son of God, in a certain way united himself with each man. He worked with human hands, he thought with a human mind. He acted with a human will, and with a human heart he loved. Born of the Virgin Mary, he has truly been made one of us, like to us in all things except sin.”
10. St. John Paul II, *Encyclical Letter, Veritatis Splendor*, no. 15.
11. St. John Paul II, *Apostolic Letter, Salvific Doloris, On the Christian mystery of Human suffering*, no.28.

12. Alan Schreck, *The Legacy of Pope John Paul II: The central Teaching of his 14 Encyclical Letters*, Emmaus Road Publishing, Ohio, 2012,p.115.
13. Hung Pham, *St. John Paul II's Solidarity with the Poor as a Eucharistic Dimension of the Christian Moral Life: A Dissertation*. Faculty of the School of Theology and Religious Studies of the Catholic University of America, Washington DC, 2009
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15. St. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter, *Mulieris Dignatatem, On the Dignity and Vocation of Women*, no. 15.
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