

Works of Mercy (cfr Mt 25:31-46)

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning! How many times, during these first months of the Jubilee, have we heard about the *works of mercy*! Today the Lord invites us to make a serious examination of conscience. Indeed, it is good to never forget that mercy is not an abstract word, but it is a way of life: a person can either be merciful or unmerciful; it is a lifestyle. I choose to live in a way that is merciful or I choose to live in a way that is unmerciful. It is one thing to *speak* of mercy, and it is another to *live* mercy. Paraphrasing the words of St James the Apostle (cf. 2:14-17), we could say: *mercy without works is dead within itself*. That's it! What makes mercy come alive is its constant dynamism in order to go and meet those in need and the necessities of those in spiritual and material hardship. Mercy has eyes to see, ears to hear, hands to lift up again....

Daily life allows us to touch, with our hands, many demands that concern the poorest and most tested of people. We are asked for that particular attention that leads us to *notice* the state of suffering and need in which so many brothers and sisters find themselves. Sometimes we pass by situations of dramatic poverty and it seems that they do not touch us; everything continues as if it were nothing, into an indifference that eventually creates hypocrites and, without our realizing it, leads to a form of spiritual lethargy that numbs the soul and renders life barren. People who pass by, who move on in life without noticing the needs of others, without seeing many spiritual and material needs, are people who pass by without living, they are people who do not need others. Remember well: those who do not live to serve, do not serve to live.

There are so many aspects of God's mercy toward us! In the same way, there are so many faces turned to us in order to obtain mercy. Those who have experienced in their own lives the Father's mercy cannot remain indifferent before the needs of their brothers. The lesson of Jesus that we have heard does not allow escape routes: I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was naked, displaced, sick, in prison and you assisted me (Mt 25:35-36). You cannot stonewall a person who is hungry: he must be fed. Jesus tells us this! The works of mercy are not theoretical ideas, but concrete testimonies. They oblige us to roll up our sleeves to alleviate suffering.

Due to changes in our globalized world, certain material and spiritual forms of poverty have multiplied: let us give space, therefore, to the imaginings of charity so as to find new ways of working. In this way, the way of mercy will become more and more concrete. It is necessary therefore, that we remain as vigilant as watchmen, so that, when facing the poverty produced by the culture of wellbeing, the Christian gaze does not weaken and become incapable of focusing on what is essential. Focus on the essentials. What does this mean? To focus on Jesus, to see Jesus in the hungry, in prisoners, in the sick, the naked, in those who don't have work and need to lead their family forward. To see Jesus in these people, our brothers and sisters; to see Jesus in those who are lonely, sad, in those who have made mistakes and need counsel, in those who need to walk with Him in silence so that they feel accompanied. These are the works that Jesus asks of us! To see Jesus in them, in these people. Why? Because this is the way Jesus sees me, sees all of us.

Now let us move on to another thing.

In recent days the Lord allowed me to visit Armenia, the first nation to embrace Christianity at the beginning of the fourth century. It is a nation that, over the course of its long history, has witnessed the Christian faith with martyrdom. I thank God for this journey, and I am deeply grateful to the President of the Republic of Armenia, to Catholicos Karekin II, to the Patriarch, the Catholic bishops, and the entire Armenian people for welcoming me as a pilgrim of brotherhood and peace.

In three months, God willing, I will make another journey to Georgia and Azerbaijan, two more countries of the Caucasus region. I accepted the invitation to visit these countries for two reasons: on the one hand to highlight the ancient Christian roots present in those lands — again in a spirit of dialogue with other religions and cultures — and on the other to encourage hope and paths of peace. History teaches us that the path of peace requires great tenacity and continuous steps, starting with small steps and gradually increasing them, going to meet one another. Precisely for this reason my hope is that each and every person may give his or her own contribution to peace and reconciliation. As Christians we are called to strengthen the fraternal communion among us, so as to bear witness to the Gospel of Christ and to be a leaven of a more just and united society. For this reason the entire visit was shared with the Supreme Patriarch of the Armenian Apostolic Church, who fraternally hosted me for three days in his home.

I renew my embrace to the Bishops, priests, men and women religious, and to all the faithful of Armenia. May the Virgin Mary, our Mother, help them to remain steadfast in faith, open to encounter and generous in works of mercy. Thank you.