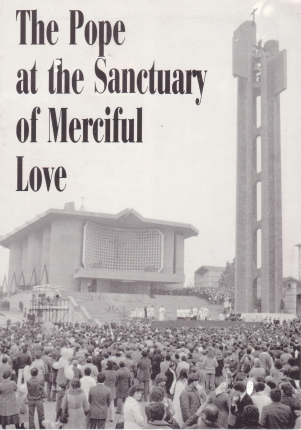


The Pope at the Sanctuary of Merciful Love





Sunday, 22 November 1981

The Pope at Collevalenza

I wish to announce to you that on Sunday, 22 November, Feast of Christ the King, I will, God willing, go on a visit to the Sanctuary of Merciful Love at Collevalenza, in the Diocese of Todi, to recall in that place of prayer and Christian piety what I wrote in the Encyclical Letter "Dives in Misericordia", published exactly one year ago: "Society can become ever more human only if we introduce into the many-sided setting of interpersonal and social relationships, not merely justice, but also that "merciful love" which constitutes the messianic message of the Gospel" (n. 14).

I exhort you to accompany me with your prayers, that my visit may bring abundant fruits of good for souls.

Sunday, 8 November: Pope's Angelus Message



Pope's address on his arrival at Collevalenza

I am here among you, a pilgrim at the Sanctuary of Merciful Love, which is a chosen centre of spirituality and piety.

Mr Minister,
and dear citizens of Collevalenza, Todi and the whole region!

1. I must express sincere thanks to you for the hearty welcome you have given me, arriving here in such large numbers and so devout, to greet me on my return to the hospitable land of Umbria, I say return, because this is now the fourth time since the beginning of my pontifical service that it has been given to me to come to this historic region which, set as it is in the centre of Italy, seems to express and sum up the characteristics of the whole population of the peninsula: balance, industriousness, attachment to moral values and the true religious spirit. To all the population of Umbria, I testify to my affection and my appreciation.

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2. Today I am a pilgrim here among you, a year after the publication of the Encyclical *Dives in Misericordia*, in which, integrating what I had already written in *Redemptor Hominis*, I called you to turn your eyes to God our Father, from whom alone all fatherhood takes its name in heaven and on earth (cf. Eph 3:15), and in like manner, too, the real dignity of man the son takes on substance, I said in that document: that from truth about man it is necessary to go back, in Christ, to the truth of the mystery of the Father and his love (cf. vol. Insegnamenti IX, 2, 1980, pages 1533-34).

I would like to say now that this spiritual journey from man to God, based on the mediation of Christ the revealer, suggested to me this journey, which is precisely a pilgrimage to the Sanctuary of Merciful Love. Fortunate is Umbria, fortunate in particular is your ancient and illustrious city, dear inhabitants of Todi, because alongside the numerous and well-known religious traditions, alongside the many artistic and inspiring Christian temples and monuments, it

possesses this Sanctuary, which is a select centre of spirituality and piety. By its very name, as also by its massive structure and the spiritual, pastoral and formative activity that is promoted here, it reminds everyone and proclaims the great and consoling truth of the Lord's fatherly mercy. What would man be, if he did not have his supreme foundation in God? What would become of him, if there were not for him, in Heaven, a Father who assists him and loves him with the generosity of his providence? What would become of him, a sinner, if he could not rely on the certainty of having in this same Father one who always understands him and forgives him with the generosity of his mercy?

To such questions, brothers and sisters, to which I already intended with my encyclical, to call all the children of the Church for a convinced answer of faith, we are called also by this outstanding Sanctuary, which has risen so opportunely in your midst. It is a "sign", and therefore an invitation to meditate on and accept the eternal message of Christian salvation, as it springs from the merciful plan of God the Father.

3. Finding myself in this land in the centenary year of the birth of St Francis, I wish to raise to him also my devout thought, in memory of the sublime teaching he left us precisely with regard to divine mercy. In his Song of the Creatures he said, among other things: "Be praised, my Lord, for those who tolive for your sake, and sustain infirmity and tribulation: (...) which will be crowned by you, Almighty God". Francis, teacher of love and forgiveness, appeals to the generous mercy of God.

Nor can I forget your fellow citizen *fra Giacopone of Todi*, who, a disciple of the Saint of Assisi, translated and interpreted in the originality of his art the interior flame of love for God, as a personal response to the prior and prevenient love of God for us. In the name of the Saints of Umbria, in memory of Giacopone and so many other men of Franciscan and Christian Todi, I begin today's pilgrimage, expressing now to all my cordial greetings with the Apostolic Blessing.



Pope's address to the sick IN THE Church

Give me your sufferings

Dear Brothers and Sisters in the Lord!

1. It is with particular emotion that I address you at this moment which was supposed to precede the celebration of Holy Mass at this Sanctuary of Merciful Love, but has come after. I wish to express to you, in the first place, my affection, to manifest to you my appreciation and exhort you to persevere courageously along the difficult way on which you have been placed by God's providence which, if it often seems mysterious in its plans, is however, always moved by infinitely wise and considerate love.

References to the meetings of Jesus with sick persons are frequent in the Gospel. He did not remain indifferent before any situation of human suffering, but had for them all a gesture of help and a word of comfort. This attitude of his was transferred to the Church, which learned from him to love the sick and endeavour to bring to them, together with the

illuminating word of faith, the concrete help that circumstances made possible.

2. You understand, therefore, why the Pope wishes to meet those who are suffering and feels it his particular duty to bring to each one the renewed proof of God's love and the fervent call to revive hope. Suffering, since Christ took it upon himself, has assumed an inestimable value: it has become a source of saving energy for the person who bears it and for the whole of mankind.

Allow me, therefore, to tell you too that I am relying a great deal on the contribution you can make to the cause of the Kingdom of Christ in the world. The liturgy calls us today to meditate on the nature and on the destiny of this Kingdom. Well, as you know, Jesus did not conquer it by force, nor did he entrust its future to the violence of arms. *Regraviat a ligno Deus*-God reigned from the Cross!

It was with suffering and death that Jesus conquered the forces of evil, reversing the desperate situation in which humanity found itself and winning for every child of Adam the right to be a citizen of that Kingdom of love and freedom which, announced here below in the Church, will have its full realization in Heaven.

3. Christ's death on the cross marked human history for ever: now, in the dramatic conflict between good and evil, of which human history is the stage and the witness, the most valuable contribution to the assertion of the forces of good can be made only by suffering accepted and offered in loving communion with the Son of God, who renews on the altar the supreme sacrifice carried out "once for all" on Golgotha.

How could we not reflect on this mysterious and fascinating dimension of human participation in redemption, now that we are about to begin the celebration of the Eucharist, in which Jesus will be among us again in the reality of his Pasch of death and resurrection?

Give me your sufferings, brothers and sisters! I will take them to the altar, to offer them to God the Father in union with those of his only begotten Son and to implore, also in their name, peace for the Church, mutual understanding among nations, the humility of repentance for those who have sinned, the generosity of forgiveness for those who have been offended, and for everyone the joy of a renewed experience of God's merciful love. **May the Blessed Virgin, who "was standing by the cross of Jesus" (cf. Jn 19:25) while he was dying for us, arouse in our hearts appropriate sentiments for this hour of light and grace. Amen.**



Merciful love, we pray to you, do not fail!

Homily of the Pope during the Mass

That God may be everything to everyone

(Cor 15:28)

1. Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Mt 25:34). We have just heard these words in the Gospel of today's solemnity. The Son of Man will utter these words when, as king, he finds himself before all the peoples of the earth at the end of the world. Then "he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats" (Mt 25:32) and will address to those on his right the words: "Inherit the Kingdom".

This kingdom is the definitive gift of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is the gift prepared "from the foundation of the world" (Mt 25:34), in the course of the whole history of salvation. It is the gift of Merciful Love.

Today therefore, the Feast of Christ the King of the universe and the last Sunday of the liturgical year, I wished to come to the Sanctuary of Merciful Love. This Sunday's liturgy makes us particularly aware that in the Kingdom revealed by the crucified and risen Christ the history of man and of the world must be completed definitively: "But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor 15:20).

Gift of eternal love

2. The kingdom of Christ, which is the gift of Eternal Love, of Merciful Love, was prepared "from the foundation of the earth".

However, "by a man came death" (1 Cor 15:21) and "in Adam all die" (1 Cor 15:22). Life and not death belongs to the essence of the kingdom born of Eternal Love.

Death entered the history of man along with sin. Grace not sin, belongs to the essence of the kingdom born of Eternal love.

Sin and death are enemies of the kingdom because the amount of evil that is in the world, that has penetrated into the heart of man and his history, is, in a way, summed up in them.

Merciful Love aims at the fullness of good. The kingdom "prepared from the foundation of the world" is the kingdom of truth and grace, good and life. Aiming at the fullness of good, Merciful Love enters the world that is signed with the mark of death and destruction. Merciful Love penetrates into man's heart, which is weighed down by sin and lust, which is "of the world". Merciful Love establishes a meeting with evil; it confronts sin ad death. And precisely in this there is manifested and reconfirmed the fact that this Love is greater than any evil.

St Paul, however, makes us aware how long the way is that this Love must travel, the way that leads to the fulfillment of the kingdom "prepared from the foundation of the world". Writing about Christ the King, he expresses himself as follows: "He must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death" (1 Cor 15:25-1).

Death was already destroyed, for the first time, in the resurrection of Christ, who in this victory showed himself as Lord and King.

However, death continues to dominate in the world: "in Adam all die", because sin weighs on man's heart and on his history. It seems to weigh particularly on our times.

How great is the power of Merciful Love, which, we await until Christ has put all his enemies under his feet, completely overcoming sin and destroying death as his last enemy!

The kingdom of Christ is tension towards the definitive victory of Merciful Love, towards the eschatological fullness of good and grace, of salvation and life.

This fullness has its visible beginning on earth in the cross and the resurrection. The crucified and risen Christ is the utter revelation of Merciful Love. He is King of our hearts.

Christ must reign

3. "He must reign" in his cross and resurrection; he must reign until "he delivers the kingdom to God the Father..." (1 Cor 15:24). In fact "after destroying every rule and every authority and power" which keep the human heart in the slavery of sin, and the world in subjection under death, when "all things are put in subjection under him", then also the Son will subject himself to him who has put all things in subjection under him, "that God may be everything to everyone" (1 Cor 15:28).

This is the definition of the kingdom, prepared "from the foundation of the world".

Here is the definitive fulfillment of Merciful Love: God: everything in everyone! All those in the world who daily repeat the words "Thy kingdom come", pray, in a word "that God may be everything in everyone". However, "by a man came death" (1 Cor 15:21), death, whose internal dimension in the human spirit is sin.

And lo, man, remaining in this dimension of death and sin, man tempted right from the beginning with the words: "you will be like God" (cf. Gen. 3:5), while he

prays "Thy kingdom come", he unfortunately opposes its coming and even rejects it. He seems to say: if, when all is said and done, God is "everything in everyone", what will remain for me, man? Will not this eschatological kingdom perhaps absorb man himself; will it not annihilate him?

If God is in everything, man is nothing; he does not exist. This is what is proclaimed by the authors of the ideologies and programmes which exhort man to turn his back on God, to oppose his kingdom with absolute firmness and determination, because only in this way can he build his own kingdom: that is, the kingdom of man in the world, the indivisible kingdom of man.

Power of Merciful Love

4. They believe this, they proclaim it and they fight for it. Waging this battle, they do not seem to realize that man cannot reign as long as sin continues to rule in him; that he is not really king when death rules over him... What type of kingdom is this, if it does not free man from that "rule and authority and power" which sweep his conscience and his heart along to evil, and cause horrible threats of destruction to spring from the works of human genius?

Such is the truth about the world in which we live. The truth about the world in which man, with all his firmness and determination, rejects the kingdom of God, to make this world his own indivisible kingdom. And at the same time, we know that the kingdom of God already exists in the world. It exists invisibly. It is in the world: it is in us!

Oh! What power of love modern man and the world need! What power of Merciful Love! In order that that kingdom, which already exists in the world, may reduce to nothing the kingdom of "rule and authority and power" which induce man's heart to sin, and spread over the world the horrible threat of destruction.

Hm! What power of Merciful Love must be manifested in the cross and resurrection of Christ "He must reign..."

The Good Shepherd

5. Christ reigns from the fact that everyone ad everything leads to the Father. He reigns to "deliver the kingdom to God the Father" (1 Cor 15:24), to subject himself to him who has put all things in subjection under him (cf. 1 Cor 15:28).

He reigns as the Shepherd, as the Good Shepherd. The shepherd is the one who loves the sheep and looks after them, protects them from being scattered, gathers them "from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness" (Ez 34:12).

Today's liturgy contains a moving dialogue of the Shepherd with his flock.

The Shepherd says: "I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down... I will seek the lost, I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the crippled and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will watch over; I will feed them in justice" (Ez 34:15-16).

The flock says: "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want; he makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still water; he restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake... Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all

the days of my life; and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever" (Ps 22 (23): 1-3, 6). This is the daily talk of the Church: the dialogue that goes on between the Shepherd and the flock and in this dialogue there grows the kingdom "prepared from the foundation of the world" (Mt 25:34). Christ the King, as the Good Shepherd, in different ways prepares his flock, that is, all those whom he must deliver to the Father "that God may be everything in everyone" (1 Cor 15:28).

Inherit the kingdom

8. How much he desires to say to them all one day: "Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom" (Mt 25:34)!

How much he desires to meet, at the completion of the history of the world, those to whom he will be able to say: "...I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me" (Mt 25:35-36)!

How much he desires to recognize his sheep by their works of charity, even by just one of them, even by a glass of water given in his name (cf. Mt 9:41)!

How much he desires to gather his sheep in one definitive fold, to put them "at his right hand" and say: "Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world"!

And yet, in the same parable, Christ speaks of the goats who will be "at the left". They are those who have rejected the kingdom. They have rejected not only God, considering and proclaiming that his kingdom wipes out man's unholy kingdom in the world, but they have rejected man; they did not welcome him, they did not visit him, they did not give him food or drink.

The kingdom of Christ, in fact, is confirmed, in the words of the final judgment, as the Kingdom of love toward man. The ultimate basis of condemnation will be precisely that reason: "As you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me" (Mt 25:45).

This is, therefore, the Kingdom of love toward man, of love in truth; and it is therefore the Kingdom of Merciful Love. This kingdom is the gift: "prepared from the foundation of the world", the gift of Love. It is also the fruit of Love, which in the course of the history of man and the world is constantly making headway through the barriers of indifference, selfishness, neglect and hate; through the barriers of the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life (cf. 1 Jn 2:16); through the source of sin which every man bears within him, through the history of human sins and crimes such as, for example, the ones that weigh on our century and on our generation... through all that! Merciful Love, we pray to you, do not fail!

Merciful Love, be tireless!

Be constantly greater than every evil, which is in man and in the world. Be greater than that evil which has increased in our century and in our generation!

Be more powerful with the power of the crucified King!

"Blessed be his Kingdom which is coming".



Pope's Angelus message on Sunday, 22 November

"From the very beginning of my ministry in St Peter's See in Rome, I considered this message my special task"

1. "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end" (Lk 1:30-33).

Today we recall these words that the Virgin of Nazareth heard at the Annunciation. We recall them, recalling the Angelus on the Feast of Christ the King, he who had been conceived in the Virgin's womb is the King.

Accused before Pilate of saying that he was a king, he replied: "My kingship is not from the world" (Jn 18:36). Although he did not inherit the earthly throne of David, yet he reigns "over the house of Jacob for ever and of his kingdom there will be no end".

Precisely because this kingdom "is not from the world" and is measured with a different yardstick from that of all other earthly kingdoms and temporal dominion.

2. It is measured with the yardstick of love, with the yardstick of merciful love. A year ago I published the encyclical "Dives in Misericordia". This circumstance made me come to the Sanctuary of Merciful Love today. By my presence I wish to reconfirm, in a way, the message of that encyclical. I wish to read it again and deliver it again.

Right from the beginning of my ministry in St Peter's See in Rome, I considered this message my special

task. Providence has assigned it to me in the present situation of man, the Church and the world. It could also be said that precisely this situation assigned that message to me as my task before God, who is Providence, who is inscrutable mystery, the mystery of Love and Truth, of Truth and Love. And my personal experiences this year, connected with the events of 13 May, impel me to cry on their behalf: "misericordias Domini, quia non sumus consumpti" (Lam 3:22).

Therefore I am praying here today together with you, dear Brothers and Sisters. I am praying to profess that merciful love is more powerful than any evil that gathers upon man and upon the world. I am praying together with you to implore that merciful love for man and the world in our difficult age.

3. Precisely on the solemnity of Christ the King last year a violent earthquake hit the Regions of Basilicata and Campania, causing death, pain and destruction. At this moment, here at the sanctuary of merciful love, let us recall in fervent prayer and entrust to the infinite love of God the Father the souls of the brothers and sisters who lost their lives on that terrible occasion. But we must remember and pray also for the survivors, for those who lost everything in that tragic event: their houses, property, fields, jobs, churches and villages. A year later so many serious problems of a social character are still unresolved. For this reason today, while I address my affectionate greeting of encouragement to brothers and sisters of the areas hit by the earthquake, I feel the need to make an earnest invitation and pressing appeal to everyone, to make, each according to his possibilities and his field of competence, a generous and active contribution in order that the legitimate expectations of those dear people may not be further disappointed.

4. "Christ has been raised from the dead, the fruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor 15:22). Today, while we are trying to embrace the mystery of Christ's Kingdom with our heart and with prayer, we meet again in it in a particular way those who have left us, "those who are dead". The whole month of November is dedicated to the memory of the latter: near and distant, all of them.

Only in this Kingdom which God has established in Jesus Christ do our dead remain in union with us. And we with them.

"...as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor 15:22).

We profess faith in the communion of saints and in eternal life!

The Kingdom which "is not of this world" (Jn 18:36) does not recognize the limits of death and the tomb, to which "this world" and man who lives in it are subjected everywhere on earth.

When we profess this Kingdom, we reconfirm the presence in the world of him for whom everything exists: "Deum, qui omnia vivunt, veritate adoremus!"



Welcome of the Superior General Father Gino Capponi to the Holy Father in the name of the two Congregations

Blessed is he who comes in the name of Merciful Love

Most Holy Father:

This glorious day which the Lord has made is for our Family an inestimable gift of grace and calls forth, from the depths of our hearts our joyous gratitude towards Your Holiness, The Mother Foundress and all the Handmaids and Sons. In saluting the Vicar of Christ, welcome and bless you in the name of Merciful Love. We beg for the light and comfort of Your word and that of your Magisterium.

The Charism of our vocation is based on the divine reality and joyful witness of Merciful Love, wondrously presented in our times by the Encyclical "Dives in Misericordia" — published exactly one year ago. Your evangelical presence here today, Holy Father, emphasizes and proclaims from this Sanctuary to the faithful and above all to those indifferent and distant, the messianic mystery of Christ, the King of Love.

On our part, conscious of the limitations but also of the religious duties of the Family of Merciful Love to the Church, we have wished to organize a first symposium on the theme of the Encyclical. The coming among us of Your Holiness constitutes a most coveted and authentic introduction.

Your presence here today will remain in our hearts and in the growth of our Congregations as indelible signs which will mature into vigorous stimulus inciting us to respond always more faithfully to the requirements of our consecrated life. There will be many external remembrances to recall in future times this

day of grace for us, not the least being this meeting room, which from now on will be called the "John Paul II Hall".

These are tender expressions of our affectionate veneration towards the visible Head of the Church, but they are animated by a sincere and humble Faith, which we hope will become always more active — that faith which has been continually transfused through the formative work of the Mother Foundress. Such faith makes us ardent in offering to Your Holiness the firm promise of wishing to correspond always more faithfully to the directive of your pastoral government. In repeating our most profound thanks, we ask for our Mother and for each of us, the comfort and joy of a special Apostolic Blessing.



Pope's address to our religious family of Handmaids and Sons of Merciful Love.

Your vocation takes on again a character of deep relevance today

Beloved Brothers and Sisters,

At the beginning of this desired meeting with you, Handmaids and Sons of Merciful Love, I am happy to address to you the words of St Paul to the Corinthians: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all consolation" (2 Cor 1:3).

The consolation that this pilgrimage gives my heart certainly yours also, deriving from the certainty of being faithfully welcomed by divine goodness, even "in every tribulation of ours". If God and his love are for us the consolation that no one can deprive us of — "no one will take your joy from you" (Jn 16:22) — we are at the same time called to foster in ourselves the irreplaceable concern to communicate such a love to everyone.

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1. To free man from his own existential fears, from those fears and threats which he feels hovering over him on the part of individuals and nations, to heal the many personal and social wounds, "the mystery of the Father and his love" must be revealed to the present generation — to whom the Lord's mercy sung by the Blessed Virgin (cf. Lk 1:50) also extends. Man is deeply in need of opening to divine mercy, in order to feel radically understood in the weakness of his wounded nature; he needs to be firmly convinced of those words dear to you, which often form the object of your reflection, that is, that God is a Father full of goodness who tries with every means to comfort and help his children and make them happy; he seeks them and follows them with tireless love, as if he could not be happy without them. Man, even the most wicked, the most wretched and finally the most lost, is loved with immense tenderness by Jesus who is for him a father and a tender mother.

2. From this short outline it follows that your vocation seems to take on again a character of deep relevance



...It is that God who designates himself "not as a father offended by the ingratitude of his children, but as a father full of kindness, who seeks by all means to comfort, assist and make his children happy... He follows them and searches for them with indelible love, as if He could not be happy without them"...

Mother Speranza

today. It is true that the Church for centuries, also through the work of the various orders and religious congregations, has always proclaimed and professed divine mercy, being a solicitous administrator of it in the sacramental field and in that of fraternal relations, but I would like to point out only that your special profession directly reaches the core of this mission, and institutionally qualifies you to exercise it.

I sincerely hope that the spirit of your Institute, which brings with it the fervour of the beginnings, will always be expressed in sound piety, in disinterested dedication and in ardent apostolic commitment, as is testified by the splendid buildings that have arisen around this Sanctuary in a few decades, and the crowds that flock here anew and increase their own Christian life.

I warmly encourage what is being done in the field of the assistance and the sanctification of the diocesan clergy. This task falls within the specific purpose of the Congregation of the Sons of Merciful Love, and the Handmaids offer their delicate collaboration for its achievement. We read, in fact, in the Book of Customs which puts the Constitutions into practice: "they will help the priests in everything, more with deeds than with words", and all that in a spirit of joyful and generous dedication. A particular effort is made to encourage among priests various and progressive forms of a certain community life [cf. *Presby. Ord.* 8]. The Handmaids, moreover, carry out in their houses a whole series of providential acts of assistance which testify to generous elasticity in adaptation to the charitable needs of places and the requests of the ecclesiastical authority.

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5. And now, dear brothers and sisters, I would like to address to you an earnest exhortation to be wisely faithful to your vocation.

Aware of the necessity that modern man has of meeting the love of the "Father of mercies", and happy to be dedicated to spreading this love, often, in the first place, within your large family, a serene and convincing witness of fraternal charity. *Congregavit vos in unum Christus amor* ("The love of Christ has brought you together"): it was Christ the Lord who took an interest in each of you and gathered you in distinct congregations, and in one family, to carry out in different ways the same progress towards perfection, in the fulfilment of the mission of evangelizing. The task of proclaiming the Saviour's mercy requires a convincing testimony of union and mutual merciful love, as Jesus himself escorted with the tragic loneliness of his last hour: "Love one another as I have loved you" (Jn 15:12). This fraternal love is in itself a proof and an evangelization of mercy: "That they may all be one, that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (Jn 17:21).

To construct the soul, even before the structures of a congregation, it is necessary to realize a love that often requires sacrifice and personal renunciation, in harmony with what Christ testified, particularly with the seal of his extreme donation.

This appeal suggests the invitation to deepen more and more the roots of your family spirit, by intense identification with the sentiments of Christ Crucified and of Christ in the Eucharist, whose images you bear in your emblem: have in you the same sentiments that were in Jesus Christ... who humbled himself... unto death on a cross" (Phil 2:5-8).

It is not possible to be heralds of mercy without intense

assimilation of the meaning and value of the extreme donations of a divine love infinitely more powerful than death: Christ Crucified and the Eucharist: of an inexhaustible love, "by virtue of which the Lord desires always to be united with us and to be present among us, coming to meet every human heart", as I wrote a year ago in the encyclical Letter *Dives in Misericordia* [n. 13], which you propose to recall in a few days with a solemn international convention.

In the contemplation of such a love, it is less difficult to resist a secularizing atmosphere which, on the pretext of a certain type of presence in the world, might have impoverished faith and made trust less deep and charity less supernatural: it is easier to foster the good spirit transmitted to you, in order to realize in you the blessedness of the "merciful", in order not only to obtain, but also to imitate mercy.

Consider this Sanctuary, intended to exalt and continually celebrate the most exquisite features of merciful love, as a constant reference point, the cradle of your vocation, the centre and sign of your particular spirituality. May the joyful proclamation of merciful love be always proclaimed in it, through the Word, Reconciliation and the Eucharist. The word you utter here to comfort and convince brothers and sisters of the inexhaustible kindness of the heavenly Father is an evangelical word. To welcome the faithful in the Sacrament of Penance or Reconciliation, which I know is administered here with constant commitment, is to make possible the experience of a divine love more powerful than sin. To offer them the Eucharistic Bread is to strengthen so many tired and weary souls in search of solace that will bring sweetness and strength along the way.

I entrust this sublime ministry of mercy, as well as your every aspiration and activity, to the Blessed Virgin, venerated by you under the title of Mediatrix, fervently invoking her that she will obtain and hasten for you in a motherly way the gift of her Son Jesus and, on the other hand, your full opening to him.

May my exhortation and my greeting also reach those Handmaids and Sons of the various communities of Italy, Spain and Germany who are not present here, with a special thought of comfort and encouragement for the two young missionary communities in Brazil.

My wish for your dear Mother Foundress, who is here among you, is that she will see you all resolutely walking along the way to holiness, according to her motherly aspirations.

I then address a special greeting, wishing them Christian joy and prosperity, to your friends and to those who support your apostolic initiatives, while I impart to one and all my affectionate Apostolic Blessing.

Holy Father's address to secular and regular clergy of the Dioceses of Todi and Orvieto

Let Divine Mercy be your priestly programme

Beloved Priests,

I wanted to meet you, members of the secular and religious clergy of the Dioceses of Todi and Orvieto, united in the person of the bishop, to express to you my deep affection and my encouragement in your life and in your priestly ministry. I am happy to see you assembled in this outstanding Cathedral of Todi which, together with the even more famous one at Orvieto, admirably sums up the faith, art and history of the population of this land. I am also happy to know that you are eager to live with me a moment of joyful fraternal ecclesial communion. I greet you very cordially, and wish to embrace, comfort and thank you all for your warm welcome. I greet in particular your Bishop, Mons. Decio Lucio Grandoni, and the two Vicars General.

Great need of mercy in today's world

1. I would have so many things to tell you and so many to hear from you, but the short time does not allow. I will confine myself, therefore, to saying forth to you some thoughts which are suggested to me by the circumstances of today's visit to the Sanctuary of Merciful Love at Collesalerno.

Speaking to priest, in care of souls, who are living and effective signs of God's mercy. I do not find any more stimulating considerations than those that are derived from this virtue, which is at the centre of the Church like a gushing fountain where everyone stops to quench his thirst. Never so much as in these times has man been in such need of mercy, which is necessary both for the spiritual progress of every soul and for human, civil and social progress. If it is lived in full, in fact, it will be able to renew the tissue of relations within your presbyterate and give your diocesan communities greater substance and inspiration of friendship, kindness, harmony, mutual esteem and confidence, and willing collaboration. Living this spirituality, there may be among you differences of views, divergences of free opinions, multiplicity of pastoral initiatives, but the unity of faith, charity and discipline will never be lacking; you will never fail to have a sense of understanding and indulgence with regard to the failings of others. In particular, you old priests will find the way of understanding your younger confreres; and you young ones will know how to establish with your superiors relations of sincerity and confidence, without taking away from those in charge the duty of responsibility, and from yourselves the merit of obedience. It is in this study of mutual mercy that the mystery of redemption in the Church is fulfilled and celebrated. Both in its interior charism of forgiveness and love, and in its exterior exercise of service for every need of your confreres, make it your priestly programme, in order to live in fullness of faith and joy the mystery of Christ who died and rose again.

New concept of the role of pastor

2. But pastoral charity demands that you be able to use this mercy to relieve souls entrusted to your care. It can be said that priests are the first and direct

promoters of the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. It is really true? But what does all this entail? All this involves a new concept of the role of the pastor, who must be able to "sympathize" (Phil 2:1), who must be tenderhearted (Eph 4:32), who must not withdraw within himself before a brother who is in need; in a word, he must become a good Samaritan (cf. Lk 10:30-37). There is no doubt that the pastoral role calls for the exercise of authority: the pastor is the head, the guide, the teacher; but a second requirement at once follows and it is that of service. Authority in the mind of Christ is not for the benefit of the one who exercises it, but to the advantage of those to whom it is directed. Authority is a duty and above all a ministry towards others, to lead them to eternal life. This pastoral role, if carried out in this spirit, leads to its fullest expression, that is, to the complete gift of oneself, to sacrifice, precisely as Jesus said and did: "The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (Jn 10:11). In this vision is included a sum of pastoral qualities: humility, generosity, kindness (remember Paul's address to the Christians of Miletus, cf. Acts 20:17-38); but also a sum of requirements of the pastoral art, such as the study of pastoral theology, psychology, sociology to avoid superficiality in relations with individual soul and with the communities.

In particular, you practise this merciful love in the administration of the sacraments, a very special occasion for mercy and forgiveness. As is known, the Father who made us sons in Baptism remains faithful to his love, even when through his own fault man separates himself from him. His mercy is stronger than sin, and the Sacrament of Confession is the most expressive sign of this, almost a second Baptism, as the Fathers of the Church call it. In Confession, the same grace of Baptism is renewed, in fact, for a new and richer integration in the mystery of Christ and of the Church. Even the frailty and physical weakness of man are, for Christ's mercy, an occasion of grace. This happens also in the Anointing of the Sick, which expresses again and renews the complete integration of the sick Christian in the Paschal Mystery, as an effective sign of relief and forgiveness. In this sacrament, in fact, Christ makes man's frailty his own and redeems it, that the power of God may be fully manifested in the weakness of the creature (cf. 2 Cor 12:9-10).

But for the sick person the Eucharist too is a sacrament of divine mercy, being the Viaticum for the last journey, and is thus destined to sustain him in the passing from this life to the Father and to provide him with the guarantee of resurrection, according to the Lord's words: "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day" (Jn 6:54). It is an act of real love to comfort the sick with this sacrament, the last one, before they see God beyond the sacramental signs and share joyfully in the banquet of the Kingdom.

Sacrament of mercy

3. Beloved priests, always be diligent and fervent in the administration of these sacraments of mercy, without sparing energy and time, deeply aware that "the Church lives an authentic life when she professes and proclaims mercy – the most splendid attribute of the Creator and the Redeemer and when she brings people close to the sources of the Saviour's mercy, of which she is the trustee and dispenser" (Dives in Misericordia, n. 13). In your pastoral

Some thoughts from the writings of Mother Speranza

Today 5 November 1927

"... that persons will know him not just as a Father indignant and offended by the ingratitude of his children but as a Father full of kindness, who seeks by all means, to comfort, assist and make his children happy; that he follows them and seeks them out with intangible love, as if he could not be happy without them. How often this has impressed me, my Father!"

In God everything is a service of Love

"It seems to me that all the attributes of the good Jesus are in the service of Love. In fact, we see that he used his knowledge to correct our mistakes, his justice to repair our wrongs, his goodness and his mercy to console us and to calm us by his generosity and his omnipotence to sustain and protect us". (Perf. n. 12, page 20).

His love conceals our deficiencies, supports our cause. He awaits our conversion

"My Jesus, I know that you call all without exception, you live in the humble, you love those who love you, judge the cause of the poor; you have mercy on all and you hate nothing that your power created. You conceal the weaknesses of men and await his repentance and receive the sinner with love and mercy. Open also to me, Lord, the source of life, grant me pardon, and heal in me all that is opposed to your divine law. (November, 7th day).

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"We hold firmly impressed in our hearts that not satisfied in crucifying our God once by original sin, we have done so many times by our personal sins; but notwithstanding such evil and obstinacy on our part, he yet pleads ignorance in our favour. How good he is! And however much it is certain that passion blinds us, interest obscures us, and ambition dazzles us, yet we do not see when we fall into sin; self-love makes us forget the love we owe to God, pride before his face, turns us against our Creator. I plead for our defence, my Jesus, for we are blind and do not know what it means to offend a God so great, a Father so good!" (Circular n. 31, p. 81).

As the heart pulsates for all members of the body

We place a special interest in making our brothers understand that Jesus is for all a Father full of goodness, who loves us with an infinite love, without making distinctions. The more perverse, the more miserable, and even the fallen — so is he loved with an immense tenderness by Jesus, who is for him a tender mother. Jesus does not make distinctions among souls if he does not grant to each person extraordinary or very special graces. He prepares some for greater sufferings that they may become as lightning-rods for their brothers.

I compare the love of Jesus to the human heart, which carries blood to all parts of the body, distributing life to even the most lowly members. In the same way do the pulsations of Merciful Love proceed. The heart of Jesus beats with immense love for all persons. It beats for rapid souls and for sinners; it beats for holy souls, for the fervent, for the infidel and for the heretic. It beats for the dying and for the souls in purgatory. It beats for blessed souls whom he glorifies in heaven.

He prefers those most in need

The good Jesus has changed me to communicate to those who deal with me that He loves all souls with the same intensity, that if there is a difference, it is this: he loves more those souls who, even though full of defects, endeavour and struggle to be so. He wishes them to be — even the most perverse, the most abandoned is loved by Him with immense tenderness. (History 19, 11, 1926).

"God makes the first move to accept the penitent sinner, embracing it with love as soon as it comes to Him; without reproaching it for the faults committed, he covers it with graces and gifts". (Las Esclav. p. 266).

He is a Father, not a severe judge

"... When souls begin to understand that they have a Father who does not hold anything against them, but pardons and forgets. He is a Father who is not a severe judge, but a holy Father, full of wisdom and beauty, who awaits the prodigal son to embrace him". (Exhort. 2.1 1995).