

February 8, 2016

To the members and friends of Regnum Christi
on the occasion of Lent in the Jubilee Year of Mercy

Dear friends,

When he convoked the Jubilee of Mercy, the Holy Father invited us to live Lent as a special moment to celebrate and experience God's mercy (see *Misericordiae vultus*, 17). He recommended that we let ourselves be challenged by the Word of God so that it can transform us into apostles who reveal to their brothers the love that Jesus has for them through our words and works.

As is traditional in Regnum Christi, I write to offer some reflections to help you live this Lenten period of conversion more fully. I also wanted to assure you that I am praying for you, your families and your communities.

The Pontifical Council for the New Evangelization has published some pastoral resources for living this jubilee year under the which have been gathered together in the book *Merciful like the Father*, which has appeared in various languages¹. Here I found some lights that will guide the ideas of this letter, especially in the section on the parables of mercy. Concretely, I want to focus on the parable of the rich man and the beggar Lazarus (Luke 16: 19-31), which is read in the Mass on Thursday of the second week of Lent.

Time for mercy

In that parable Jesus highlights the contrast between the rich man who dresses like a king and has food in abundance and Lazarus who is practically clothed in wounds and who does not even receive the crumbs that fall from the rich man's table. One is a skilled man with all the talents he needs to increase his wealth and network with those capable of helping him. The other is a poor man who seems to be invisible to the rich man and those who pass him by.

The almost frenetic rhythm of life that we lead at times can have a similar effect on our lives. Perhaps we are busy with many things. We live constantly challenged to maintain the difficult balance between our family, work, academic and social life. The thousand and one things we have to do to bring the family forward and, not infrequently, simply to make it through to the end of the month, can absorb all of our attention and little by little make others and their needs invisible. We even

¹ In English these catechetical resources are published as 8 separate volumes and available at <http://www.osv.com/YearofMercy.aspx>.

run the risk of ceasing to see those who are closest to us and those whom we love, such as a spouse, a child, one of our friends, a coworker or an employee. This is even more so in the case of the strangers we run into every morning at the subway station or on the way to work or school. We are close to them all but do not have time for them. Perhaps we are so wrapped up in our affairs that we do not have time for them.

The parable makes me reflect that God sees things very differently. Sacred Scripture does not tell us the name of the rich man, who received the time and attention of many. By contrast, the poor man, ignored by people of importance, is mentioned by name four times in the Gospel. Isn't this an invitation to us all to open our eyes and see the world as God does? Doesn't the Lord want us to use this Lent to examine ourselves and see how much attention we pay to our brothers and sisters, to help us continue converting and come to truly believe that everything we do for others we do to him?

I believe this Lent the Lord is inviting us to leave aside whatever closes us in on ourselves so as to have time for mercy. The rich man of the Gospel wanted to be merciful when he no longer had time for it. Today we have the opportunity to love better than up until now.

The works of mercy

In the bull for the Jubilee, the Pope invites us to reflect on the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. What is more, in the plenary indulgence that he granted for our own jubilee year, the Pope associated this grace with the practice of the works of mercy. He does this to awaken our consciousness that we are apostles who at times are lethargic when faced with the drama of those who suffer, of the poor, of the outcasts, of the sick (see *Misericordiae vultus*, 15).

Who among us has not experienced the profound joy of being able to serve our brothers and sisters: taking care of a sick relative, counselling someone in trouble, consoling a sad person, visiting a prisoner, feeding the hungry or clothing someone who is cold, sharing the message of the Gospel? Through these actions, which always demand that we forget ourselves, the Lord makes his Kingdom present in the world. He allows us all to recognize in the needy our brothers and sisters, worthy of our tenderness and compassion, and at times even of our capacity to forgive.

Perhaps the rich man of the parable also used his money for good things. However, he was so busy with his things that he did not become directly involved in doing good to concrete people. He got caught up in a thousand things that bound his heart to the point that he could no longer respond to that question which the Lord put to Cain at the beginning of history, "Where is your brother?" (Gen 4:9)

A Legionary priest recently told me that at the beginning of his ministry he went once in a while to a hospital for those who had incurable sicknesses, together

with young people from Regnum Christ and precandidates from some of our minor seminaries, to offer the sick the sacraments and a bit of love and company. Visibly moved, he told me that he realized there that he was not just helping “the sick” but rather Mr. Smith, Francis or Mary.... They stopped being an idea and began to be people with very concrete stories and all in need of love. For a merciful heart the needy stranger becomes a concrete person whom we can love and to whom we can show the love God has for us.

I think that this Lent Jesus wants Regnum Christi members to open their eyes and generously take advantage of the concrete opportunities we have to love Christ in our brothers. Mainly in those who are close to us in our own family, at school or at work but also in those removed from our daily life. We have to be attentive to the Holy Spirit and listen to him so he can suggest to us the right things to do and the appropriate words, and give us the courage to put them into practice, especially when they bring us away from our own concerns and out of our comfort zone.

This may demand sacrifices such as reducing the time we dedicate to entertainment, talking on the phone or being on social networks. We have to find time to be more available for those concrete individuals God has placed at our side. Perhaps all of this even helps us to dare to “waste” our time with someone who feels lonely or believes that no one is thinking of him.

Forgive and ask forgiveness

Another important area in this Year of Mercy, one which I mentioned in calling our own jubilee year, is the capacity to forgive and to ask forgiveness. The rich man in the parable seems to recover his sight only after his death, recognizing Lazarus in Abraham’s bosom, whereas during his life he was never able to see him right at his very door. The rich man now begs for mercy but can no longer obtain it.

With this parable Jesus encourages us to use our life and our time to ask God for mercy and also to practice it with our neighbor. He encourages us not to wait for tomorrow to forgive nor to ask for forgiveness. He does not want us to get so used to the wounds of our brothers and sisters who are suffering in spirit or in body that they no longer awake a reaction in us. Jesus wants us to love actively, and this finds its expression in forgiveness. He teaches us to say to the Father, “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.”

Perhaps the Lord wants us to use this Lent to remember if there is someone with whom we have to be reconciled, to see if there is some wound that has still not healed. Perhaps this Year of Mercy is a fitting moment to take the first step towards forgiveness. How joyful we will make the Heart of Christ with such a gesture! By actively showing mercy we will be sure to find mercy before God.

We are in the Year of Mercy and Jesus wants us to experience mercy in our smallness so that we can then spread it around us. In a world that at times lives without time for mercy, may we be able to do our part, small as it is, and shout out to our brothers and sisters that the mercy of God is limitless, that he does not tire of forgiving, that he does not forget any one of his children.

I ask the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of Mercy, to accompany us all on our Lenten journey. Count on my prayers.

Fr. Eduardo Robles-Gil, L.C.

P.S. Please do not forget to pray for the Holy Father and also for those who will participate in the evangelization missions this Holy Week. A missionary is for many people one of the most luminous signs of the God's mercy.