

... My Beloved Poor 1.3

“Come, you whom my Father has blessed, take for heritage the Kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world: **I was hungry** and you gave me food,

I was thirsty and you gave me drink,

I was a stranger and you made me welcome,

naked and you clothed me,

sick and you visited me,

in prison and you came to see me.

Matthew 25:34-36

Jesus identifies himself with the hungry, the thirsty, strangers, the naked, the sick and prisoners. Our relationship with our neighbour implies our relation with Jesus Christ, because whatever we do to others we do to Christ. **The love of God is necessarily expressed in the love for our neighbour.**

Jesus' message wants to open our eyes about how **to set in operation, throughout the world, the spirit of mercy** and not the spirit of exploitation, that of respect and not that of contempt.

However, it is not sufficient to that the works of mercy are to be carried out only by politicians. Everyone must show mercy to every brother and sister.

Mercy is a sentiment generated by compassion for the misery for others (moral or spiritual). It derives from the Latin word *miseriors* (genitive *miseriordis*) and from *misereor* (I have mercy) and *cor -cordis* (heart); cf *miserère*: have mercy. It is a moral virtue greatly considered in Christian ethics and is exercised in works of compassion or, precisely, of mercy.

- In Hebrew **mercy is *khesed*** and has its **roots in the covenant between the two parties** and, consequently in the solidarity of one party towards the other who is in difficulty. In the New Testament mercy has a different meaning and other words are used to define it.
- In Greek ***eleos*** indicates the **sentiment of intimate commotion, compassion, pity**, the opposite of envy for the good fortune of others. Often it is **fear** of being of being struck by the same evils.
- In the **Gospels** the need to be merciful is well explained in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:37). Other examples in Luke are 1:58 (*the Lord manifested His mercy towards her* (Elizabeth), and in Mark 10:47-48 (the blind man of Jericho shouts: *Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me!*). Jesus affirms too: *Blessed are the merciful because they will obtain mercy!* (Matthew 5:7). *This is simply help given by someone to another person, that is disinterested almsgiving. Jesus criticises the search for public praise and the affirmation of self in giving alms* (Matthew 6:1-4). *St. Paul wishes to be considered a person who has obtained mercy from God.*(Timothy 1:3,16)
- Another term used in the New Testament is *oiktirmòs* which indicates, with a different shade of meaning, the sentiment of compassion for the misfortunes of one's neighbour. (*God, Father of Mercy* in II Corinthians 1:3.
- Lastly, *splanchna* represents the **centre of sentiments: the depths of a person and the heart**, considered to be the place of instinctive passions: anger, desire and love. Even **Jesus** felt His heart break at the sight of human misery: *“And Jesus, feeling sorry for him ... (Mk 1:40). St. Paul writes in Corinthians 6:12 “the constraint is in your own selves.”* “The man who is kind to the poor lends to Yahweh: he will repay him for what he has done.” (Pr 19:17)

- **Mercy aims above all at the heart: to have a heart open to the poor and the orphan, and open to the miserable and the weak.**
- Christian Tradition has developed seven works of corporal mercy and seven works of spiritual mercy. **They are a Sacrament in action.**

Give food to the hungry ...

2.8 billion people survive on less than 2 dollars a day and more than a billion people do not have access to drinking water. The gap between rich and poor has never been so wide.

12% of the world's population living in North America and Western Europe monopolize 60% of total private consumption while 33% of the world population, living Asia and Africa, have only 3.2% of the rest. Thus, today the "rich" European and American consume, on the average, 25 times more energy than the "poor" African.

LET US LISTEN TO THE WORD OF GOD

Let anything left be for the stranger, the orphan and the widow. Deut 24:17-22

Have I taken my share of bread alone, not giving a share to the orphan? Job 31:16-20

Share your bread with the hungry. Is 58:6-11

The disciples decided to send relief to the brothers living in Judaea. Atti 11:27-30

Their intense poverty has overflowed in a wealth of generosity. 2 Cor 8:2

Each one should give what he has decided in his own mind, not grudgingly, or because he is made to ... 2 Cor 9:7

The poor will receive as much as they want to eat. Ps 22

The Lord listens to the cry of the poor. Ps 106

Quick to be generous, he gives to the poor. Ps 112

I was hungry and you gave me to eat. Mt 25:35

Give them something to eat yourselves. Mk 6:37

When you give a lunch or a dinner, invite the poor. Lk 14:12

At his gate there lay a poor man called Lazarus. Lk 16:19

- **Jesus' request** to feed the hungry is a thorn in the side that does not leave politicians in peace until they commit themselves to a **just sharing of material goods**. Giving money to other countries only makes sense if they carry out their duty, fight against corruption and use funds in a really efficacious way. However, our decisions must not cause disadvantage to others.
- A political dimension is not excluded from corporal works of mercy, but **we ourselves are involved by means of our private action**. Even in our midst there are **hungry people**, many **families** who have difficulty in buying the bare necessities to live and many **mothers** bring up alone their children and live on the threshold of poverty.
- **These poor people find it hard to beg. And we, too, must not humiliate them with our almsgiving.** Whenever we give food to the hungry, we must treat the person as a king giving him/her the feeling of royal dignity.
- **Begging** – it is not easy to decide whether I give food to the hungry or if I am deceived by a refined trick. Carrying out Jesus' teachings is not always easy.
- **When Jesus talks of hunger**, He does not only mean a grumbling stomach but indicates a

deeper hunger. He means **hunger for justice**. “Man does not live by bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.” Mt 4:4

- Each one of us meets **people who hunger for:**
love, affection, affirmation
to possess something that nourishes their soul: words which give life
a sense of consideration that raises them up.
- **Jesus had compassion on the crowds** and asked His disciples: “Give them something to eat yourselves Mt 14:16. They are like sheep without a shepherd, tired and exhausted, confused and lost. The multiplication of the loaves was always seen by the Early Church as a pre-figuration of the Eucharist.
In each of us there is a strong **hunger for God**, in spite of appearances. Jesus made Himself the Bread of Life to satisfy this hunger and to thus be sure that we understand this love that He has for us. He, too, hungers for our love. **He makes Himself hungry. He said it: “I was hungry and you gave me to eat...”**

WE COMMIT OURSELVES TO A NEW LIFESTYLE

- Hunger is a sign that proclaims, without a shadow of doubt, people’s fundamental need of eating in order to live. The answer to this primary need is that of every father and mother who carry out two actions: they nourish their children and teach them to provide food for themselves. It is evident that the **basic tragic question of our times is a political question, 20% of people eat 80% of the cake.**
- But a Christian cannot wait for those responsible of world politics to resolve this question. Neither can they content themselves by having supported a certain proposal of law or of having protested in order to obtain a solution to the problem. **The person who is hungry needs to eat now, immediately.**
- **Every Christian family** should simply add a **place at table**, that is, to take account, in his expenses, of an extra mouth to feed. It may detract the corresponding amount from the weekly income and destine the amount to a needy brother or sister, near or far.
Otherwise would it be possible to pray: “Our Father who art in Heaven”?

Some suggestions:

- Being attentive in not wasting anything food – let us even eat old bread...
- organise a “poor meal” devolving the profit made to some organisation that works to alleviate hunger in the world
- propose certain days for fasting during chosen times (e.g. Fridays)
- avoid whatever is superfluous
- identify political strategies so as to transform the sharing of bread into an attitude sharing on a wider level. We are personally called to share with others our life, our bread, our capacity, our love, our resources which we have received from our parents and from God.

The first work of mercy wants us to open our eyes to the situation in which we can share our existence. If we share the life we have received we, too, will receive a gift in our turn. Sharing, in fact, allows us to participate in the riches, gifts, skills and love of others



LET US REFLECT

I was hungry and you gave my food as forage cattle.

I was hungry and your multinationals have planted winter tomatoes for you on my land.

I was hungry and you did not want to renounce your steak from South America.

I was hungry but where the rice for my daily meal should have grown, tea is cultivated for you.

I was hungry but you have distilled petrol for your cars from our sugar cane and manioc.

I was hungry but with your money you have been able to buy food which I could not pay for.

I was hungry but you have planted exotic fruit on my land for gluttons of rich countries like yours.

(Declaration of Bern)

P.S. *I am hungry*

but your conscience will rebel against the injustice of possession

and your converted heart will bring forth

new fruit of solidarity

so that I will no longer be hungry.