

Clothe the Naked

“Naked” means to **strip clothes off**. To be “naked,” therefore, is to be in a state of having had your clothes stripped off. It is because clothes have so much to do with our dignity as human beings that Jesus urges us to clothe the naked. But this confronts us with a problem. As with every counsel of Jesus, **the command to clothe the naked has both a practical and spiritual dimension**, because grace builds on nature. And there's the rub: Our encounters with the naked beggar are fairly rare, as are yours.

However, if we cast our view further abroad, we discover that this is not the case universally. At this hour, many millions of Lazaruses around the world sit naked or nearly naked for a simple reason: They cannot afford clothes, and the clothes they have – ragged, infested with maggots and insects ... **they are the only shield they have from cold, heat... and shame.**

**Each one of these persons is Jesus Christ.
Clothe him and you have clothed the Son of the Living God,
and He will not forget it on That Day.**

- On the one hand, clothes are symbolic of our external lives, of the junk that, at the end of the day, does not matter. Jesus tells us that the body is more than clothes (Lk 12:23).
- But, on the other hand, clothes are also associated in the biblical mind with the outward expression of what is stored up in the heart. Jesus describes those ejected from the Great Marriage Feast as being thrown out because they neglected to wear the Wedding Garment (Mt 22:1-14). In Scripture, you do not show up for a feast in rags, or for a fast in rich apparel but in sackcloth and ashes.
- In short, clothes are never just clothes. They mean something. They express something. Clothes are also extensions of ourselves, and they can even be sacramental. Paul tells us:

**Let us then cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light;
let us conduct ourselves becomingly as in the day,
not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness,
not in quarreling and jealousy.**

But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

Rom 13:12-14

- The Church tells the newly baptized:

**"You have become a new creation, and have clothed yourself in Christ.
See in this white garment the outward sign of your Christian dignity."**

- The command to clothe the naked is concerned, primarily, not with the need for human warmth as the need for human dignity. It is to remember that clothes were made for man, not man for clothes, and that, above all, we are to:

**Put off the old nature with its practices and put on the new nature, which is being renewed
in knowledge after the image of its creator ... Christ is all, and in all.
Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness,
meekness, and patience, forbearing one another and,**

**if one has a complaint against another, forgive each other;
as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.**

And over all these clothes put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

Colossians 3:9-14

Naked I came from my mother's womb, naked I shall return.(Job 1:21).

Human life evolves between two nakednesses: that at the beginning of life and that at the end of life. Two different nakednesses, because, in between the process of subjectivity takes place: if one is born naked, at the end of life one is stripped.

The act of clothing nakedness at the beginning and end of life places the whole of human existence in the care that another person (starting from a mother) has and reveals for us. Dressing oneself is an art that the child learns from his mother who dresses him; the old person must often be helped in dressing and undressing. **And during one's existence there are situations of poverty and misery** which can take away material goods and reduce one to nakedness. **This nakedness** means not only being exposed to inclement weather, but also to humiliation, contempt, lack of defence and danger.

The act of clothing the naked implicates taking care of his body, thus a type of intimacy, touching and measuring the body so as to adequately dress it. But it also implicates taking care of his soul since **clothes protect interiority** and underline that the human person is an interiority which needs love and protection. A garment gives that sense of **modesty** which is perhaps the most primitive gesture that distinguishes the human person from animals and does not limit itself to the sexual aspect but has to do with the integrity of the human person, and above all with a sense of identity and subjectivity.

The human action of clothing the naked is based, for the Bible, on the primeval gesture of God Himself who covered human nakedness by preparing clothes to dress Adam and Eve after their transgression: "The Lord God made clothes out of skins for the man and his wife." (Gen 3:21) Man's transgression from the beginning in the garden resulted in the fact that human beings broke their communion with God and became aware of their nakedness, that is of their limited and fragile condition of being creatures.

Sharing clothes with the poor is a gesture of intimacy that requires **gentleness, discretion and tenderness** because it has to do with the body of the other person, with its uniqueness which is crystalized to the full in the face which remains naked, uncovered. The vulnerability of the face reminds us of the fragility of the whole body, of the whole human person.

Clothed with Christ, through baptism, and leaving behind the nakedness of the limited fragile human condition, Christians know they have been immersed in God's mercy. (Tt 2:4-5) Since they are covered and embraced by God's mercy, their actions of charity towards those who are naked and ashamed, powerless and miserable, humiliated and deprived of their dignity, will be a **reflection and a testimony of divine mercy**. In fact, clothed in a sacred garment, the garment of divine glory, we learn another way of relating to each other and we get used to seeing others who wear "the garment of divine glory."

The Prophet Isaiah encourages Sion:

**"Awake, awake! Clothe yourself in strength, Sion.
Put on your richest clothes, Jerusalem, holy city."**

Isaiah 52:1

Clothes make man. Thus says a proverb. Today, often this proverb for youngsters is a bitter reality. Young people with little self-esteem must absolutely wear designer clothes, otherwise they are derided by their friends. **The person without self-esteem** needs external signs. Those who must absolutely wear expensive designer clothes often, in reality, are naked. **They have no trust in themselves. To dress them means to show their true value which does not depend on the clothes they wear.**

People often feel themselves naked when they are criticised, if their actions and way of thinking are discussed in public, and often they are falsified while they are unable to defend themselves. **To clothe such a person** is a work of mercy. It is necessary to have the courage to clothe that person in order to protect him/her, even if, sometimes, doing so one risks being the target of criticism. **If a young person blushes in a group**, another make fun of him/her and so the young person **is stripped** in the group and **made naked**. It would be a kindness to cover his/her nakedness, ignoring the fact that he/she blushes and treat him/her in a normal way.

In the Bible we find the **story of Noah** ... “and they covered him with their cloak.” Instead of speaking about someone’s nakedness or observing him/her with curiosity, we must cover him/her with pity, **embracing him/her with our love**. The one who despises the nakedness of another and, by his conversations he/she increases it, does evil to self. Sooner or later, even his shame will be discovered. When we cover the nakedness of another we not only act **in a merciful way** towards our neighbour, but even towards ourselves.

God’s love is like a garment that protects us. And in the same way, we must cover with the garment of love even people whom we meet in their nakedness and shame so that they may feel protected. But to be able to enwrap others in the garment of love, we must, above all, wear in our turn the garment of grace. Even St. Paul exhorts us:

“You should be clothed in sincere compassion, in kindness and humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with one another.”

Col 3:12

🌀 How to Act ?

People remember **St. Martin with his cloak**, which he divided and gave to a beggar. After this spontaneous act of giving, Christ Himself appeared to him in a dream, showing him that he had given his cloak to Him.

Countless children and adults in the world would walk barefooted and have little to wear, except for donations of usable clothing. Nor would they have household items such as towels, blankets and bed linen. To them, the “pre-owned” goods are true blessings.

Catholic social teaching also considers the naked as “those stripped of human dignity and power . . . and necessary tools for work.” The right of human beings to dignity, the power to control their own lives, and even to work, are God given. Our moral responsibility is to preserve and protect those rights. As God’s hands on Earth, we can help to clothe and unburden the needy. Here are some suggestions:

- **Support and donate** activities run by schools, parishes and other charitable organizations that collect clothes and bedding for the local needy.
- **Organize programs** to provide towels and bed linen for hospitals that lack these essentials in distressed areas, particularly in developing nations.
- **Act in solidarity** to aid parishes in areas devastated by tornadoes, floods, earthquakes and hurricanes, leaving residents with virtually nothing. Listen to stories of Solidarity ...
- **Reach out to neighbours** who have lost their possessions in fires, floods or in other ways.
- **Encourage** someone whose dignity may have become fragile due to loss of a job. Suggest retraining in a new area of work, or help them seek work if you are in a position to do so.
- **Be charitable**, but always remember that in giving it is more important to maintain a person’s sense of dignity; no one should ever be made to feel like a “charity case.”

*By the grace of God let us serve Him
with all our hearts and work for His Glory.*

Magdalene of Canossa



☩ The Charism of Magdalene

P. Adolfo Antonelli, fdcc.

In the phrase “**Inspice et Fac secundum Exemplar**” there is “**simultaneousness**” of intentions and thus action. **The Canossian Charism is also a Charism of “simultaneousness”**. We notice in her Memiors that Magdalene, above all, describes her mystical experiences in a discreet and brief way. Just as **she listens to the Divine Word, she answers immediately in a personal way, with the whole of self: spirit, soul, heart and will**. In her mystical experiences we can see her original realization of Jesus’ commandment:

**You must love the Lord your God with all you heart,
with all your soul, with all your strength and with all your mind,
and your neighbour as yourself.**

Luke 10:27

- “*Listening to the Book of Tobit ... I decided to dedicate myself to works of charity.*” (Mm, I, 25)
- “*As I recited the Miserere, at the verse: “Docebo iniquos”, I felt urged to teach Christian Doctrine to my fellowmen... and thus I began to explain it...*” (Mm, I, 27)
- “*Every time I heard the Gospel passage: ‘Euntes in universum mundum’ my eyes would fill with tears...*”. (Mm, I, 28)
- “*Attending those Masses which have the Divine Glory as their theme, I had such a strong desire to prevent sins.*” (Mm, I, 29-30)
- “*Reading the verse ‘Inspice et Fac secundum Exemplar’, I felt urged to follow the Crucified Christ .*” (Mm, I, 32)

God’s Word captures Magdalene and she allows herself to be concretely involved.

God - Magdalene – Neighbour are inseparable. From this life giving encounter with God, His Word and the Sacraments, the vital and original encounter with people springs forth. Magdalene contemplates and acts in every sphere. She showed a unique and equal intensity of involvement:

Divine Word – Incarnated Word (Jesus Crucified) - Crucified One in the Poor and Forgotten.

She is captured by a unique attraction, a Unique, equal and total involvement. Thus we may say that **service, attention for the poor, Magdalene’s charity, her way of being and doing, are Evangelizing**. Her meeting with others promotes them. We cannot talk of the Canossian Charism without referring to the Word of God. Magdalene starts from the Word: “*Magdalene plans, organises and conducts her ministries of charity, her writings and her life, and this makes it possible for us to conclude that her judgement of the reality of her time was mainly based on her experience of God and her understanding of His Word.*” (JPIC, p. 54).

The Kingdom of God is made present by Jesus’ Word and action. His Word and His very action render visible and perceptible the Kingdom. **It is a real possibility offered to all**: evangelization and human promotion are at all levels “simultaneous”.

“*Although Magdalene’s plan is centred on the service of the poor, she was convinced that charity embraces every kind of person*” and it is even for this reason that Magdalene invites us to be “*servants of everyone.*” (JPIC, p. 51)

**Therefore we may make ourselves heard today and leave a sign in people’s hearts
if what God places within us we are able to communicate to others
by the language of service, gratuitousness and authenticity.**