

Bury the Dead

... My Beloved Poor

In all cultures and religions rituals for the burying of the dead have developed. Burying the dead was the work of mercy that **Tobit** carried out during the exile of the Hebrews in Babylon. It was also the work of mercy carried out by **Joseph of Arimathaea for Jesus**.

Today there are precise laws which regulate the transportation and burial of the dead: it is a public service. No one could do it of their own initiative. **Therefore, how can we express Christian piety for the dead?** Above all it consists in accompanying the departed relatives, friends, acquaintances, fellow workers and neighbours to their funeral.

There are three ways of living this work of mercy:

- The first way is to **take part in the funeral**. One may be present for the sake of **convenience**, that is, a presence which is respectful and silent. But one may participate **in an active way** through prayer and taking part in the Eucharistic liturgy.
- There is a second way to express our respect for the departed: with flowers and our **good works**. Certainly it is a sign of kindness and good-heartedness to cover the coffin and the grave with flowers; but very soon the flowers wither and die. The most beautiful flowers are rather our good works, **the works of charity**, which are signs of our reverence for our departed ones.
- There is a third way that comes from our faith: **animate the funeral and the burial with the light and hope of the resurrection**. Even if today it is not possible to materially bury the dead, taking part in the funeral through prayer, living alms to the poor with a sense a new faith in the resurrection is a different way, but a luminous and fruitful way of living the seventh corporal work of mercy.

St. Luke describes, in a loving way, the burial of Jesus. **Joseph of Arimathaea**, who Luke describes as an upright and virtuous man, took down the body of Jesus, **“wrapped it in a shroud and put Him in a tomb which was hewn in stone in which no one had yet been laid.”** (Lk 23:53) **The women went to the tomb with perfuse oils to show all their love for Jesus. By their loving attitude at the burial of Jesus they fitness their belief that Jesus was really a just man and in Him love conquered death.**

Through the burying of our dear ones, really we are **acting as if it were Jesus Himself**. When burying every dear one we place in the grave something precious. At that moment, we forget the weaknesses and the mistakes that the person had made. During the burial, we place in the grave, with great respect, the mortal remains of a person, of whom we admit that we cannot penetrate the real mystery. Our faith tells us that **Christ dwelt in this person** and that in him **something of the mystery of Jesus Christ shone in him**, even if it was obscured by his limitations.

The Catechism summarizes the longstanding teaching of the Church concerning respect for the bodies of the dead. This is rooted in our absolute Christian claim that these bodies shall be raised from the dead: **“The bodies of the dead must be treated with respect and charity, in faith and hope of the Resurrection. The burial of the dead is a corporal work of mercy; it honors the children of God, who are temples of the Holy Spirit”**.

And it is an expression of faith because the departed are not simply forgotten, having ceased to exist. The cults of the dead are based on the supposition that the departed will continue to live in a different way, in another world. Burying the dead means **taking our leave from them in a dignified way**. Today, in big cities, sometimes no one is present at a burial. The relatives do not want to face the funeral and the mourning of their departed one. One can sense a feeling of lack of respect for the human person which is becoming diffused in certain ambits. It is necessary to take sufficient time to mourn the death of a loved one. Sometimes the relatives of the deceased call the Funeral Agency too quickly and leave to this agency all the necessary details.

Burying the dead does not only mean taking care of the grave but, above all, **to remember them especially in every Eucharistic celebration** in which we live in union with them. To remember the dead does not mean to live in the past, but to understand the message they transmitted through their life and death, and to respond to this message with our lives. The remembrance of the dead is expressed in various forms:

- **to recount what we remember of the departed** and what was important for him, what occupied his thoughts and the values he lived;
- **to take loving care of the grave.**

Burying the dead has far broader implications. It encompasses compassion and support for survivors to help them to cope with their loss and to encourage them to go on living with the living. Anyone who has ever lost someone dear to them knows firsthand the depths of pain and anguish associated with such a loss, whether it be a spouse, parent, child, sibling, other family member, dear friend or classmate. Youngsters who suffer any loss face particularly difficult circumstances.

As God’s hands on Earth, we can help ease the sufferings of the dying and give comfort to those who remain. Here some suggestions:

- **Provide companionship**, be a good listener, have compassion, comfort them with kindness and pray for them;
- **Offer daily prayers** for the grace of a happy death for the terminally ill and for the peace and comfort of family and friends;

- **Urge those who have particular difficulty** in coping with death, to seek pastoral or professional counseling;
- **Attend funeral or wake services;** your presence can mean so much to relatives;
- **Send appropriate Mass Cards** for the dead and spiritual bouquets for the living. Even a single note with thoughts and prayers can have a healing effect on those grieving a loss.

☪ The Charism of Magdalene

Fr. Adolfo Antonelli

Poverty as Freedom

There are some elements that I would like to underline in this text of the Act (3:6-7): “But Peter said: “I have neither silver nor gold, but I will give you what I have: in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, walk! Peter then took him by the hand and helped him to stand up.” Peter declares to be a poor person among the poor. He raises up this crippled man by showing himself to be on his level: **“I have neither silver nor gold, BUT I WILL GIVE YOU WHAT I HAVE”**.

The fruitfulness of charity depends on faith in Jesus Christ and not on our securities and human means.

It is total sharing. Giving without calculations: “I will give you what I have.”

Is it really true that we give everything we have, or do we give only the surplus?

Magdalene reminds us

“Jesus, on the Cross, was stripped of everything, except of His love.”

Magdalene really lived the experience of poverty, of the search for ways of real sharing with the poor. She writes to Domenica Faccioli in 1828:

*“Then for the answer to be given to the Municipality I am sure that what Fr. Giovanni had done will be very good, so it is not necessary to send me any copy because with the price of the post, it is important to **avoid unnecessary expenses**. Even when you have to prepare the envelop try to use the lightest paper otherwise I have to pay a third more.”*
(Ep III/3, p. 1899)

She writes to Dabalà in 1834:

“In the little case you will find a beautiful little box with sugar cubes that you will give to Eleonora Canossa, wife of Carlino, in my name. You can dispose of the rest as you like. You will receive my watch from Carlino, which has been estimated to be worth only ten coins; but I am sorry not to have had it polished before giving it to them ... Cristina may ask my sister Orti if she is able to gain 18 or 20 coins from selling that watch.” (Ep III/5, p. 3704)

And again: *“For the roof tiles and the house, it is better to pay a mason than a doctor. **We must not spend money if we can spare it; do not be afraid, God will give us what we need.**”*
(Ep III/5, p. 3373).

In the guidelines of JPIC we read: *“Christ also identified with and chose to be poor. Hence Magdalene saw the poor as his images and chose to serve and become one of them. For her, to know how to love and to be poor, one must at Jesus who was stripped of every on the Cross, except of his love.”* (JPIC, p. 49)

Share in order to restore harmony in creation

Peter dirties his hands while “raising up the poor crippled man”. He does not act at a distance, but takes hold of the man with his right hand. I would dare to say that he, **with this gesture, he restored the dignity of this man as a creature of God.**

“Magdalene desired that each person might realize his/her full human and Christian identity through the acquisition of the capacity to contribute to society; a sense of meaning and purpose in order to value and appreciate life; and a serene acceptance and integration of moments of sickness, suffering and even death.” (JPIC, p. 50)

This is not easy at all, but it is totally evangelical and Canossian.

It is evangelical and Canossian, above all, because it **restores a divine aspect to the creature and creation**, which came forth from the mind and heart of God, the Father and Creator. Above all it was man who was placed at the centre of the universe: **“O Lord, our God, how great is your name throughout the earth...”** (Psalm 8)

Benedict XVI writes: *“Respect for the human being and for nature are one and the same thing, but both of them may prosper and find one’s place only if we respect, in every human creature and in nature, the Creator and His creation. Only He can unite them together.”*

St. Magdalene writes to Durini in 1815: *“It is true that the Lord’s infinite charity always brings to fruition the **design of His mercy with harmony, intelligence and satisfies the desires of people...*** (Ep I, p. 395)

The first pages of the Bible remind us: *“God created man in the image of Himself; male and female He created them...”* (Gn 1:27).

I believe that the **“SPREADING OF DIVINE GLORY”** is realized by **“restoring the Divine aspect to all that belongs to God, especially where there is injustice, poverty and sin have blurred His image.”**

Therefore, this implies **a UNIVERSAL CHARITY at the SERVICE OF CREATION for the GLORY OF THE CREATOR; a humble charity which is constant and creative; universal charity!**

Magdalene says: *“Charity is a fire that spreads and tries to embrace everything in its path.”*

In the text of JPIC we can find: *“We are called to contemplate the presence of God in creation, in persons and events and discern the divine action in our surrounding world and cosmos, looking with the eyes of the Father and judging with the heart of Christ, so as to act according to Spirit-inspired values.”* (JPIC, p. 62).

As you can see, I would like to examine some passages from the Bible, both Old and New Testament, and also from the first Christian community, that is, from the Acts of the Apostles, in which I will try to bring out the lifestyle of the Sons and Daughters of Charity: **“THE ICONS OF JESUS CHRIST, SERVANTS OF THE POOR, TODAY.**

“Jesus, as a servant of humanity, who makes the supreme self-offering, is our model for human relationships and for a lifestyle of true dedication to God and our neighbour.” (JPIC, p. 49)

And again: *“The gift of the charism has called us to reclaim our identity as Daughters of Charity, Servants of the Poor, so that every apostolic intervention of ours may reflect that specific mode of the love of Jesus Crucified.”* (JPIC, p. 58)

I remember, too, a significant expression of our dear M. Filomena Annoni: *“To accept as a rule of life the charism of the ‘greatest love’ means committing ourselves to live the call WITHOUT CALCULATIONS, WITHOUT HALF MEASURES, WITHOUT REDUCTIONS, but in a most generous, most patient, most amiable way.”* I like that expression of accepting as a norm of life the charism of ‘the greatest Love’, because it means that we cannot act differently.

M. Filomena, in a few words, summarized its meaning:

**live as poor people with the poor and for the poor:
without calculations, without half measures, without reductions,
in this way:
most amiable, most patient and most generous,
not in an extraordinary manner, casually,
but in an ordinary way, always.**

In JPIC we can find:

**“Every service of Magdalene was offered gratuitously to the poorest,
not seeking material rewards since the
the Divine Glory and the salvation of souls were enough.”**
(JPIC p. 52)

I would like to conclude this reflection with a quotation from the Unabridged Rule. In the chapter regarding poverty she writes:

**“ ... following the example given us by our great Model Jesus Crucified ...
the Sisters must first of all live a perfect common life ...”**
(Magdalene of Canossa, UR, Poverty, p. 36)

**How aware are we of the incisiveness, today,
of the message of total sharing of our life
according to the evangelical model of fraternity?**

It is a fraternity which is honest, real, difficult, but springs from our awareness that we all share the same dignity as children of God.

In times in which families often break up, a life of communion is like a guiding light which arouses hope and makes us reflect on the beauty of deep, human relationships, because they come from God’s heart. The world needs this too.