

Counsel the doubtful

... My Beloved Poor

In a society orientated almost continually towards changes of every kind and bombarded by numberless words of all sorts of teachers, it is not certainly a novelty that doubts arise in the minds of people concerning many arguments and, in particular, on the existence of God, of Jesus Christ and of eternity. **Doubt, sometimes, lacerates existence**, it puts intelligence to the test and strongly upsets the heart which is made to live in peace and to love.

When someone starts doubting the Word of God that we find in the Bible and does not trust God's goodness and fidelity, he should reason and convince himself that the source of every doubt is the father of lies, the one who infiltrates the mind in many ways: arrogance, pride, uncontrolled freedom.

پس **To whom has the task of proclaiming the Word of God been assigned?**

It has been assigned **to the Pope and the Bishops**, firstly, and then to **Priests**, and not only to these people but even to **all the baptised**, no one excluded. All of us have the duty to witness our faith, we are all required to deepen it, to spread it and give a helping hand to those who waver. We cannot be satisfied with being Christians by half.

Doubt is part of life, it serves as a search for the truth, it makes the person more human so that he begins his journey and continues in his search for truth and life. What counts is always to return to our faith through doubt. Doubt is part of faith, it brings us to solidarity with people. Before counselling the doubtful, I must give myself satisfactory answers to my doubts.

**TO COUNSEL MEANS TO PROVIDE, PREPARE, REFLECT,
I TAKE CARE OF THE OTHER PERSON,
I PRONOUNCE WORDS THAT HELP THE OTHER OVERCOME THE SITUATION
IN WHICH HE FINDS HIMSELF.
I HELP THE OTHER PERSON TO RECOGNISE HIS RESOURCES
FROM WHICH HE CAN DRAW IF HE FALLS INTO DOUBT.**

Sometimes doubts may cause **desperation** which is finding oneself without a way out. One has the feeling that there is no meaning in continuing to struggle and to live. Life is too difficult. Desperation brings the loss of trust in God's Providence. We hope that in the time of desperation

we can find hope. Counselling the desperate, giving them a good reason to have hope, is truly a work of mercy.

پس *How to counsel the doubtful ?*

Commitment in three areas is important:

1. **Pray and give thanks to God** for all those who have a deep faith in Jesus Christ, our only Saviour, and who dedicate themselves to the proclamation of the Kingdom of God, our Father.
2. **Show great charity and mercy** to all those who do not yet know the Lord Jesus or, though they know Him, they feel perplexity and doubt. It is not enough to pray and simply desire that the "Kingdom may come."
3. **Have "a full knowledge of the Father's will** with all wisdom and spiritual knowledge" as St. Paul says in his Letter to the Colossians, that is, to deepen his great plan of salvation for all humanity:

"God wants everyone to be saved and reach full knowledge of the truth."

(1 Tm 2:5)

How can I personally carry out this Work of Mercy in my daily situation?

Following the command of Jesus:

"Go throughout the whole world and preach the Gospel."

We must all feel ourselves sent and protected and helped by the Spirit of the same Lord Jesus.

It is necessary to arouse in people we live with, the desire to listen to the revealed Word, the Gospel, because faith springs from listening to the proclamation of the Good News. Doubt which falls upon the mind and heart of people may only be defeated by listening to the truth and by the grace of the Spirit which is always present.

Invite friends and acquaintances to take part in conferences and seminars on Biblical, liturgical, theological topics, and meetings on Scriptures.

If possible, let us **offer a good book as a present**.

Not only this, **but must be open to listen, with patience and love**, to those who need to unburden themselves, their doubts, false impressions about people of the Church, fear of God's judgement and of Eternity. Everytime one listens to another, this brings serenity without having to say many words. This is evangelization.

Comfort the Sorrowful

Of course, there are all sorts of affliction in the world, and many of the other corporal works of mercy are directed to relieving them. Starvation, thirst, sickness, nakedness, and death are, among many others, forms of human affliction that the other works of mercy directly address. Which

raises the question: Why a separate work of mercy that seems to recapitulate all the others?

I think the secret lies in the fact that comforting the afflicted is a *spiritual* work of mercy. This is exactly the point that Jesus makes in countering the devil (and the entire naturalistic bent of the present age). Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. True affliction is not, in the end, bodily affliction. It is spiritual. We can endure incredible hardship physically if we are secure in the love of God, the hope of heaven, and faith in Jesus Christ. This has been demonstrated countless times in the crucible of human history and the laboratory of the saints. Our work of comforting the afflicted is rooted in every celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, that is, where our kingly, prophetic, and priestly office finds its profound source and fulfilment. When we offer prayer on behalf of the afflicted, we bring them to God the Father through Christ Crucified. When we receive the Eucharist and pray through it for the afflicted, we bring nothing less than the hope of heaven to every sufferer. We may not see how or whether that grace comes to fruition, but the reality and power are there in Christ Jesus.

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Who is the afflicted person?

**The afflicted person is one who feels deprived of strength,
he is without support.
He longs for someone to give him consolation, comfort, interior fortitude.**

The afflicted do not want people to offer them false consolation with pious words. Comfort is not based on words.

- . **To console** means **to remain firm close to the afflicted person** when other support is lacking in painful events. If one manages to accompany the afflicted person, without trying to mask his suffering with words, the afflicted person will gradually recount what makes him feel so bad. One invites him to talk, **without giving him any advice or a ready-made solution. Simply one must listen and wait. This is comfort.**
- . **To console** means **to remain with the one who is lonely.** The **Holy Spirit** is always identified as the 'Paraclete', the 'Support', the 'Consoler'. **It is the one who is called to be remain alongside, who assists us and consoles us.**
- . **To console** means to assist the other person in his sorrow but also to speak words that may touch his heart so that he may regain strength.

In the Bible consolation is expressed not only with words but through ritual. The Scriptures recount the **ritual of the chalice of comfort** which is given to the one who suffers. Jesus resumed this ritual. He gives the chalice of comfort to his disciples. It symbolizes the love with which he sacrifices himself for us. We, too, must offer the chalice of our love so that the afflicted person may drink from it.

Jesus says that the afflicted are blessed and promises them that "they will be consoled." (Mt 5:4) Jesus does not want us to pass over death or other painful situations regarding people or communities.

To console the afflicted does not mean sticking a plaster over suffering but rather to encourage people to cry for what makes them suffer and what they lack. Only in this way their strength

increases. Through suffering we encounter the Consoler who comforts and assists us. The Consoler, the Holy Spirit, is the true consoler who enters within us in our suffering transforming it from within.

Jesus expected the sadness of his disciples:

“Yet you are sad at heart because I have told you this.
Still, I must tell you the truth: it is for your own good that I am going,
because unless I go, the Advocate will not come upon you;
but if I do go, I will send Him to you.”

Jn 16:6

Only if Jesus leaves us and we cry for His departure, the Consoler will come, something new, the Spirit who does not only help us from the outside but He is within us. Passing through sadness we recognise the Spirit. In the Holy Spirit, Jesus Himself, is in the hearts of the disciples. This is the true consolation that we, Christians, should communicate. It is not us who bring comfort. We may only return authentic comfort that is within the heart of every person. Christ wishes to remain impressed in us. He will be in us and with us. This transforms our sadness into joy that no one can take away. We must render witness to this in our lives, our faith and our being close to the afflicted.

پس Charism of Magdalene

Fr. Adolfo Antonelli

... TO COMFORT ...

Now I will try to consider briefly the second point regarding the chosen theme: “TO COMFORT”.

I would like to start with a passage from the Gospel, or rather, refer to the second part of the text that was examined in the first point of our meditation: “**The Parable of the Good Samaritan**”.
(Lk 10:29-37)

We meet a SAMARITAN, the last of the three characters mentioned by Luke, who were travelling along the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. The Samaritan was considered to be the least among the men of Palestine at that time, the least esteemed from a religious point of view. And yet this man is the true example that Jesus presented as a model of love; the person who knew how to put into practice God’s command and he knew how COMFORT.

He is the one who knew how to love, to spend his time for the one who was in need of him, to be a neighbour to the person he met by chance along the road.

- **Without words, comforting presence**

The Samaritan, on seeing that poor man half dead, did not start to discuss and grumble about the evil times, delinquency, society, inadequate laws and the duty of those who should guarantee security and vigilance, continuing his journey satisfied with his moral code, his wisdom of knowing how things should be, his critical sense. The Samaritan, **WITHOUT SAYING A WORD, GOT OFF HIS HORSE**: “He bent over the man, bandaged his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them. He then lifted him on to his own mount, carried him to the inn and looked after him.” (Lk 10:33-35)

No words are exchanged between the two of them but the Samaritan was a comforting and reassuring presence. Even the four stretcher bearers who brought the paralytic to Jesus let their actions communicate their love!

In *Deus caritas est* at n. 15 we find: "The parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37) leads to two important clarifications ... **Whoever needs me and I can help him**, is my neighbour ... Despite being extended to all mankind, it is not reduced to a generic, abstract and undemanding expression of love, but calls for my own practical commitment here and now.

Which are real needs?

Meditating on these few verses which are so intense with meaning and in which Luke describes in a dynamic way the personality of the Samaritan, I asked myself what could have been the immediate need of that poor man so gravely wounded and abandoned by everyone? Certainly and first of all, he needed comfort and a "reassuring" and meaningful presence. The etymology of the word "to comfort" means: sharing my strength with the other. Therefore, the Samaritan shared with the poor wounded man, without any strength, the strength of his love and solidarity. While human selfishness (the one who had wounded him) had taken away his energy and made him helpless on the side of the dusty and deserted road, now the COMFORT of the Samaritan (the strength of love) makes him get up. Ghandi once said: "The greatest strength that man knows and possesses is love."

• Empathy

I would now like to express some of my considerations regarding the second point of our meditation together with some passages from a text of Luciano Sandron.

"At the base of a relationship of efficacious help, either in a therapeutic or pastoral ambit, there exists the capacity of feeling 'empathy' in an intimate way. We establish harmony with the other person by feeling that the life of the other person is mine, but without losing the quality of 'being myself'. In other words, to be in harmony with the inner world of the other person, without losing the perception of 'difference' and 'distance'. Sometimes there is no true empathy but rather confusion; a sort of total identification with the emotive experience of the person who suffers, without a differentiation between myself and the other. There is always the risk that one's emotional problems, the excessive identification with the other person and the continual contact with his suffering may bring one to be involved too intensely with the other person, so as to become particularly vulnerable and to be "contaminated" in some way. Not only we fail to help the one who suffers, but we may become wounded too."

The psychologist Cicelj Saunders writes: «*We must learn what it means to be "close" to patients without being "like" patients if we want to give them the kind of listening and stable support of which they are in need in order to find their own way.*» (Settimanale di attualità, February 2009, n. 4, p. 1).

Then, if "to comfort" takes on the meaning of making the other partake of my strength (strength of love and solidarity), giving that strength that the other person does not have or has lost, means to **EDUCATE OURSELVES so as not to confuse ourselves with the other person.**

"**Firmness and gentleness**" characterised the way of educating and relating of our Foundress.

Thus Magdalene wrote: «... they should try to handle each one in the way she is made, valuing the benefit of education in the formation of the heart. On account of us having many different feelings, this requires that we use greater gentleness with one, more forcefulness with another and more reasoning with another and so on.» (UR, pp. 143)

Some verses found in Isaiah seem to me to be very meaningful.

*“The Lord is an everlasting God, He created heaven and earth ...
He gives strength to the wearied, He strengthens the powerless.
Young men may grow tired and weary, adults may stumble and fall,
but those who hope in the Lord renew their strength, they put out wings like eagles.
They run and do not grow weary, walk and never tire.”*

Is 40:28-31

To comfort, then, means transmitting that force of love which we did not give ourselves and we cannot give ourselves, but which springs up from the “Divine Source”, as our Foundress reminds us in the Preface of the Unabridged Rule. (p. 20)

*We must aspire to attain
the perfection of Love.*

Magdalene of Canossa