**Mother Teresa – becoming mercy**

Quite surprisingly since we hold her up as an icon of mercy the word mercy was really not in the vocabulary of Mother Teresa, we are in fact Missionaries of Charity and not Missionaries of Mercy. She spoke continually of charity, of love. In order to prepare this talk I had to reflect somewhat for myself on the meaning of mercy and the meaning of charity. What is the difference? *Deus caritas est.* God is charity, is love, it is His nature, it is who He is in Himself and as we know charity is poured into our hearts in Baptism. Mercy strikes me much more as the way he relates to us sinful creatures in fact in Misericordia Vultus defines mercy as;

*“the ultimate and supreme act by which God comes to meet us ... the bridge that connects God and man opening our hearts to a hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness.”MV2*

I think this is one of the first points that needs to be brought out, that Mother Teresa saw herself as one in need of the mercy of God and as one who had experienced the mercy of God. This she made clear in the letters she wrote when she asked permission to found our congregation, when she wrote down the dialogue which went on between her and Jesus. She says;

*“My own Jesus – what you ask, it is beyond me ... I am unworthy – I am sinful – I am weak – Go Jesus and find a more worthy soul, a more generous one.”*

And He replies;

*“You are I know the most incapable person, weak and sinful, but just because you are that – I want to use you for my glory. Wilt thou refuse?”*

Jesus doesn’t tell her, ‘No, you’re not.’ but rather ‘Yes you’re like that but knowing your weakness and sinfulness I want to use you to bring my love and mercy to others.’

In the same dialogues at a later stage Jesus says to her,

*“My little one – come – come – carry me into the holes of the poor – Come be my light – I cannot go alone – they don’t know Me – so they don’t want Me. You come – go amongst them – carry Me with you into them ... in your love for Me – they will see Me, know Me, want Me.”*

I think this reflects a second step so to speak. The first is that I realize the incredible mercy of God towards me, how despite my misery, my sinfulness, my weakness God stoops down to me and pours His love into my heart, first of all through baptism and then on the many occasions when I fall away from His love, and then more incredible still I discover that he not only loves and forgives me, but He wants to live His life in me, He calls me to become another Christ. In our Constitution it says,

*“Just as the seed is meant to become a tree, we are meant to grow into Jesus ... we who enter in to the mysteries of Christ’s life ought to be moulded into His image until He is formed in us.”*

In Misericordia Vultus Holy Father says that

*“Jesus Christ is the face of the Father’s mercy ... Mercy has become visible in Jesus of Nazareth ... whoever sees Jesus sees the Father.”MV1*

So if I become Christ, I too in a certain way become a living incarnation of mercy just as He is. This we can see clearly in the life of Mother Teresa, in the way the Church is now holding her up as an icon of mercy. She reached that, but she reached that because she worked at becoming that and she called us to also strive for that. In fact when writing the Constitution and speaking of our fourth vow of wholehearted and free service to the poorest of the poor she says first of all that it means;

*“an unceasing and wholehearted labour in making ourselves available to Jesus so that He may live, in and through us, His life of infinitely tender, compassionate and merciful love for the spiritually and materially poorest of the poor.” (Con 69)*

I can only do that if I am living a life of communion with Him. If I’m not praying I can’t do it, I will only give myself. But that is a labour, I have to work at it.

This brings us to another important point which I think cannot be stressed enough for us in our ministry. We are not social workers. We do not do works of mercy simply for the sake of alleviating suffering. For us as MCs, our particular mission is not to do works of mercy but to labour at the salvation and sanctification of the poorest of the poor. There is a very clear motivation behind our works, we want to draw souls to Christ we want through our works to reveal to those who are suffering, who are in difficulties the love of Christ for them and bring them to Him. Over and over again Mother would remind us we are not social workers. Again in our Constitution she writes;

*“Christ calls each of us to be His co-worker by allowing him to radiate and live His life in us and through us in the world of today, so that the poor seeing us may be drawn to Christ and invite Him to enter their homes and their lives.”*

It is not so much then a case of doing works of mercy, but as I said before of becoming mercy. That as God has reached out to us in our misery and sinfulness, renewing within us His image and likeness, we try to do the same. When Mother Teresa speaks of our particular mission as MCs she says that we are to;

*“Lov[e] and serv[e] Him in the distressing disguise of the poorest of the poor, both materially and spiritually, recognizing in them and restoring to them the image and likeness of God.”*

How to go about that? In the end it is not so much what I do but the way I do it, again I quote from our Constitution;

*“We shall always welcome anyone who comes to us as Jesus Himself, and be always available to those who are in need with kindness and humility.”*

And again;

*“If we want the poor to see Christ in us, we will first see Christ in the poor ... This means love, humility, kindness in the face, in the eyes, in the smile and in the warm greeting.”*

Those who met Mother Teresa even for a very brief time had the experience of being loved by her. She dealt with people one by one, gave her whole attention to the person in front of her. She was not interested in numbers, but in the immediate needs of the person, of how concretely she could make present the love of God to that person.

This desire of hers to give attention to the one in front of her goes back I think to whatever was the experience of Jesus’ thirst that led her to found our congregation. Among other passages of scripture she was very much struck by psalm 69:20 “I looked for pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none.” In the later years of her life on a holy card of Ecce Homo on which were printed the words, “I looked for one that would comfort me and I found none,” she would write, “Be the one.”

“I looked for one that would comfort me and I found none, **BE** the one.”