



June 2021

THE DIAKONIA OF CHARITY

From the First Letter of St. Paul the Apostle to Corinthians (13,1-13)

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

From Padre Pio's speech on the first anniversary of the inauguration of Casa Sollievo

Today, we are starting the second phase of our journey. The path to be taken is the following: the Work appeals again to your generosity to become a town whose hospital is technically suitable to the most demanding medical needs. The Work is aiming at increasing the number of wards and beds by three times. Additionally, two houses, one for women and one for men, will be added, where those tired souls and bodies will be in contact with our Lord and receive solace from him. An intercontinental study Center will help doctors improve their professional knowledge and Christian training. We must complete this Work so that it becomes a temple of prayer and science, where mankind finds itself in the Crucified Jesus like in one stable, guided by one shepherd.

Here the Work's children, who gather and pray together in every part of the world according to the spirit of St. Francis and the Pope's directions and intentions, will find their common house for their prayer groups; here priests will find an ideal place for meditation; here men, women, nuns will find homes to improve their spiritual training and their ascent to God, so that God's Love, the consumption of the Christian perfection, may live in faith, in detachment, and in devotion. Love is the implementation and communication of the superabundant life that Jesus declared he had come to give to mankind. Let's listen to His invitation: *"Like my Father has loved me, I myself have loved you; remain in my love"*. Jesus acts like the godly teacher and a curing doctor. He is the author of life, who, after dying once, is still ruling alive.

If this Work were merely solace for bodies, it would just be a model clinic, made with the means of your extraordinarily generous charity. But this Work aims at being the operating sign of God's love, while showing itself as a sign of charity. The suffering person must live God's love in it, by wisely accepting his pain, his quiet meditation on his destiny towards Him.

In the Work, love to God will be strengthened in the patients' souls through the love to the Crucified Jesus, carried out by those who assist their sick bodies and souls.

Here, patients, doctors, priests will be like containers of love, which, the more abundant in one person, the more intense will be given out to others. Priests and doctors alike, will be bound to sick bodies in their profession of charity. They will feel the strong desire to remain in God's love, in order for them and their patients to find the same, single dwelling in Him, who is Light and Love.

Let all mankind feel ready to cooperate with this apostolate among suffering people and let everybody comply with the Spirit's urge: from Jesus they will receive the glory that the Founder gave to Him in the



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first place, and they will become one thing in Him, *"I am in them and You are in Me, so that their unity is perfect and the world is aware that You have sent me and You have loved them as You have loved Me"*.

Let Our Lady of All Graces, who is the Queen who receives our love several times a day and to whom we ask for Her maternal assistance, rule always in the town which will be built around Her Temple, and assist you all.

Let the Virgin warm up Her children's love for the Vicar of Jesus Christ on earth, and one day show Jesus in the magnificence of His Glory.

CATECHESIS

A question: *Missionaries of Casa Sollievo, in which way?*

Father Marcellino Iasenzaniro recalls the episode of the miracle of San Pellegrino in Altavilla Irpina which Padre Pio had witnessed - then his name was Francesco Forgione - who at the age of eight went on a pilgrimage to that shrine with his father. Among the pilgrims there was a mother who prayed so insistently for the healing of the deformed baby, which she had in her arms, that little Francis was moved and joined in her prayer. At a certain point the woman threw the baby on the altar, saying: "Since you don't listen to me, you take him." Suddenly the child recovered completely. Father Marcellino also notes that someone would like to attribute the miracle to Padre Pio himself, while it is important to him to underline how since then little Francesco had a particular tenderness towards people in need, which led him to become an intercessor with God for others.

In contrast with the icon of the gruff and strict friar, in reality Padre Pio's soul was made of a very particular sensitivity, which in some way preceded the very virtue of charity that animated him. Father Marcellino continues his story by quoting a phrase that the friar often repeated to his brothers: «I am so sorry to see you suffer. To take someone's displeasure away, I wouldn't find it difficult to stab myself in the heart. Yes, it would be easier for me ». We can thus understand how in his person the great attention to the material needs of the brothers merged with his priestly spirit which bound him to their spiritual needs.

Mission and charity

Mission and diakonia of charity are the two essential aspects of the presence of a Christian in society. The miracles of Jesus are undoubtedly the sign of the advent of the Kingdom of God, as he himself affirms, but we cannot imagine that he was insensitive to the suffering of people. All the miracles he performed, as well as his choices to bring sinners closer to God, the caring words he addressed to the least and the poorest, always refer to this God who gives all of himself to man. In Jesus, the saving mission and love for man are identified: his charity is the origin of salvation, only his salvation makes us understand the greatness of his love. This kind of church lives its prophetic mission through the proclamation of the Word, the celebration of the sacraments, through prayer and charity. This kind of church makes listening to the suffering one of its essential choices.

Since their origin, the Prayer Groups have been an active part of this church, at least in two respects: first of all they support those who work in charity with their prayers; and secondly they gave in the past – and are still giving today - an important economic support to the charitable initiatives of the Church, in general, and of Casa Sollievo in this case. So as to live and actualize the spirit of our Groups today, it is necessary for us to adopt a new sensitivity, capable not only of listening, but also of that personal involvement that was a characteristic of Padre Pio.

Missionaries with our enemies

It is necessary to embrace the concept of gift as expropriation, of the loss of something that belongs to us, thus narrowing our habitual comfort zone. The recent economic crises and migratory phenomena in



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the Mediterranean and in many other border areas have highlighted not the lack of interest in those in need, but a sort of solidarity based on the concept that it is necessary to help without getting involved; investing in charity, but guaranteeing one's privileges; offering help without the need to change our lifestyle. It is understandable that this is happening in a secularized society that lives without any Christian principles. On the other hand it seems quite strange that it has adepts even among those who profess their faith to a God who has put everything on the line; it is difficult to imagine a Christian who refuses to follow Jesus on the path of losing himself and his own security.

Padre Pio was certainly one who could lose himself in the name of charity. More than one person still remembers that he treated those who spoke badly of him or acted against him with more loving care than others. Doctor Kisvarday said that one day he saw Padre Pio treat with great affection, even embracing him, an employee of Casa Sollievo whom he knew was his detractor. Left alone with Padre Pio, he said to him: "But Father ... and are you hugging him too? ... don't you know how many things he has done against you?". And he replied, : «Yes I know! He is my traitor; that's why I treat him like this".

Of course our personal stories must be respected, as the choice of each one must be respected, but it is good to be completely honest with ourselves. Often when it comes to problems such as immigration, unemployment, the economy of the state, we rely on hearsay, clichés and everything pushes us to hide our fears, selfishness and disinterest. It is true that the choice is personal and each one has the right and duty to act according to their conscience, their history and also the problems that pass through their own territory; so no one can accuse others of disinterest in these problems or forms of selfishness. All together, however, we are called to confront those words of Jesus which invite us to deny ourselves, with the grain of wheat that does not bear fruit without dying, with the yeast that will make the dough grow.

We encompass all of these aspects, even when we come to live charity.

Missionaries because we welcome Jesus in us

Pope Francis often combines these two words, mission-charity, asking us for an awareness that is not only economic support, but also opinion and true defense of the principles that animate ecclesial charity. The risk of the lack of a social formation and of a real knowledge of the problems of the poor can negatively influence our choices of conscience. I can understand that during an hour of adoration or while listening to a catechesis this subject matter may seem out of place; but is it really like this or it is our way of praying that has now detached itself from reality, it is made up of prayers that do not touch our hearts or our habits. Sometimes I ask those who come to mass every evening (and it is a holy and commendable thing): how many times this week have you gone out after the Eucharist a new man or a new woman? Let us not take the risk of "getting used to" the words of the Consecration, when Jesus repeats once more: "This is the cup of my blood offered for you and for all". If this evening he offers himself totally to the Father in the Eucharist, what am I going to do?

Cleonice Morcaldi lets us have us many sentences of Padre Pio regarding the Eucharist

Paraphrasing Saint Augustine, I would like to say: "Why him and not us". In order for charity to truly touch our life, we must have the courage to know, to inform ourselves and to understand and then write these things in the notebook of our hearts.

Missionaries of forgiveness

Father Rosario da Aliminusa writes: «I confess that I have never been able to understand how Padre Pio could show a particular esteem and benevolence towards people whom I really cannot define as deserving of positive judgment for their qualities and for their conduct. I never wanted to investigate this fact, considering it my duty to respect anyone's freedom of judgment.

I was in fact asked to intervene more than once, so that Padre Pio would not behave in this or that other way, while in fact Padre Pio was always acting according to a certain measure of him ".

This singular attitude of Padre Pio - as Father Rosario points out - often scandalized people, in reality was precisely the meeting point between charity and mission. The believer is not the one who judges,



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but he shares love with Christ, especially love for sinners. Ultimately only through true faith does charity turn into mission and vice versa.

One evening Father Pellegrino said to Padre Pio: "Father, I am under the impression that you practically identify faith with compassion". "Well, yes," replied the saint. "If you believe that faith is a gift from God, you cannot help but have mercy on those who do not have it at all or are losing it. Indeed I place the pinnacle of faith in compassion and the pinnacle of compassion and piety I put in faith.

When I take an act of faith, I am immediately moved with pity not only for myself, that is, for my lack of faith but also for all those who do not have the joy of faith and those who suffer in their own flesh. And when I make an act of mercy, even if only corporal, I inevitably am moved with pity for those who have a weak faith or have none at all. It is my great wish and hope that through our efforts as children of God the great House for the Relief of Suffering will always be fully operational for all unbelievers and sinners.

Missionary men and women

We are at the end of this catechesis. The goal was to make us increasingly aware that Prayer Groups are also like womb communities: we must know how to welcome, we must know how to attract others. Above all, however, we need to foster that inner need for the wellbeing of our brothers and sisters, which stems from our love for Christ and was at the centre of Padre Pio's life. The journey is not over, on the contrary it begins right now. Let us live it in the awareness that in every part of the world there are other people who like us share the spirituality of Padre Pio and his same "inner need for the salvation of souls".

On June 16 - like every year - we will celebrate the day of community prayer with all the Prayer Groups of the world; let us give this day a particular missionary intention, to feel more and more attracted and involved by the announcement of Jesus, who came to bring fire to this earth. (See Lk 12:49)

Act of Entrustment to St. Pio

O glorious St. Pio of Pietrelcina,
saint of this new millennium,

you are our friend,

the consoler of our souls and help of us sinners.

You understand us so well, for you know what it means to suffer.

To you we entrust our well-being and that of our loved ones;

To you we entrust our spirit

that we may be able to endure the pains we carry in our hearts;

To you we entrust the request of presenting

our souls to the Virgin of Grace

to obtain eternal salvation from the Lord;

To you we entrust our plea of intercession

to obtain from the Divine Goodness the grace.....

which we so ardently desire.

Keep us under your protection,

defend us from the snares of evil

and above all intercede for us before the Most High

so that through the forgiveness of our sins

we may persevere in doing good.

Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

3 Glory be to the Father...