

The Divine Mercy

For a renewal of our pastoral method.

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April 3, 2008
Saint Mary Major Basilica

Coinciding with the Octave of Easter, a numerous group of Bishops and Cardinals - 170 Bishops and 10 Cardinals - made, last week, a pilgrimage to Galilee, invited by the Neocathecumenal movement. Wednesday 26 they celebrated the Eucharist near the lake of Galilee in the church of the « Primacy of Peter ». Mass was presided by the actual Archbishop of Cracow, His Eminence the Cardinal Stanislas Dziwisz, who was, since 1966, the faithful secretary of Karol Wojtyla, and who had the honour of faithfully accompanying our beloved John-Paul II right up to his definite departure for the house of the Lord.

New Evangelization

In this incomparable setting, during his homily addressed to his concelebrating brothers, my Lord Dziwisz invited them to pray to God for a rapid Beatification of John-Paul II, expressing the wish that he will be proclaimed « Patron of the New Evangelization! ». We know that this very expression of « New Evangelization » was used, for the first time, by John-Paul II in Haiti. It was March 9, 1983 and, in Port-au-Prince, he spoke thus to the Bishops of CELAM: « the commemoration of half of the millenium of evangelization will have its full signification if, you, bishops, you accept an engagement, united to your presbyterium and your faithful; engagement not for a re-evangelization but for a new evangelization. New by its fervour, by its methods, by its expressions ».

However, it is evident that it is not enough to form the postulate of the New Evangelization. The simple assumption of the idea could obtain the full agreement of the theoreticians of the pastoral Theology, but this will not help us to advance in the practice of this Evangelization. What is fundamental and determining, consists in participating, with the same enthusiasm as that which encouraged John-Paul II, at the announce of the New Evangelization. This is the main gift of this World Congress on the Divine Mercy: explain to the Church and to the world that the New Evangelization should be understood and practiced as a continuation of the cry of Christ on the cross: « I am thirsty ».

The New Evangelization is the definite expression of the Mercy of Christ who - as we heard in the gospel of the second Sunday of Easter - does not stop in front of the closed doors because of our fears, but who, driven by his merciful love and exerting his Divine Sovereignty, introduces himself amongst them - amongst us - without touching the door and without asking permission, to offer us passionately the fruit of his redeeming love. Consequently, what does the mystery of the Divine Mercy bring for a correct understanding and a practical start to the call for the New Evangelization? When John-Paul II made his appeal for the New Evangelization, specifying that it should be the reflection of a new « ardour », of new

« methods » and a new expression, he stated it not like a casual order but conscientiously different.

Effectively, one of the main errors of our pastoral observances, could consist in reducing the success of our evangelization work to the simple seeking of attractive pastoral methods for modern man, forgetting the main and principal reason for the New Evangelization: the new ardour. This « new ardour » to which John-Paul II referred supposes a facility for thoroughly searching with the heart of Christ who, at the moment of being transpierced by our sins, stated his thirst for our holiness. When we speak about « New Evangelization », we easily remember the passage from Mt 9,16: « Nobody puts new wine into old wineskins; if they do, the skins burst, the wine runs out, and the skins are lost. No; they put new wine into fresh skins and both are preserved ». In our theological pastoral we run the risk that this gospel message - « For new wine, new wineskins » - could be interpreted as an invitation to innovate our pastoral set-up, leaving in the background the invitation to our conversion. Said with other words, all of us who, in one way or another, expect the Church pastoral to arrive at a successful issue, are tempted to think that the problems of evangelization can be overcome by changing the « horse » but not the « jockey ».

Witness by John-Paul II

Finally, the New Evangelization can only be brought to a success if, we, the actors of this pastoral work, have an ardent desire for holiness... if we incarnate in our life the « I'm thirsty » of the crucified Christ. Without going further, we have been able to witness an obvious example of the « evangelization from the cross » in the illness, the agony and the death of John-Paul II.

Effectively, the illness, the agony and the death of John-Paul II have allowed the Catholic Church to undergo a big lesson of confidence in the Mercy of God as well as abandon to his Providence. The months and the years that preceded the death of John-Paul II proved very difficult, specially as regards to the informations and the comments transmitted by the major part of the occidental broadcasters: « Was it prudent, at the time we are living, forever occupied by the image of culture, to maintain at the supreme office of the Church a man so ill and so weak? » The calculations of the human strategies caused suffering and trembling to a lot of people in the heart of the Church. However, all these mistrusts and fears disappeared when the world witnessed how the illness, the agony and the death of John-Paul II was transformed into a glorious event. How many lessons were we able to learn during these days!

I have always asked myself what moment in the life of John-Paul II was the most efficient in his evangelization work. The athletic Karol Wojtyla with his surabundant qualities and plans or perhaps a John-Paul II already elderly and as weak as abandoned to the Mercy of God? We shall know, one day, although it is possible to have an idea by the word of Saint Paul: « My power is at its best in weakness... For it is when I am weak that I am strong ». (2Co 12,9-10). How many souls did he lead to God, this servant of the Lord - old in the eyes of the world - who died in perfect peace, showing his confidence in the Divine Mercy and saying simply: Let me go now to the house of the Lord ». He realized the work of the New Evangelization in giving us an ultimate lesson of « giving his life » by placing his life in the hands of God. The saints are better evangelizers in their decrepitude than in their plenitude. With a smile we can say of John-Paul II what is stated in the Book of Judges about Samson: « Those he killed at his death outnumbered those he had killed in his life » (Jg 16,30).

To resume and conclude this first part of my narrative: the New Evangelization should be understood, primarily, in relation with the ardour of those who vibrate in rhythm with the same

pulsations as the Heart of Christ. The new methods and the new expressions will come later, for love will sharpen our capacities. Even more, the ardour towards the Heart of Christ sharpens the imagination of the apostles for defining new ways, capable of meeting with secularized man. We see this in the Gospel passage: « Do not worry about how to speak or what to say; what you are to say will be given to you when the time comes; because it is not you who will be speaking; the Spirit of your Father will be speaking in you » (Mt 10,19).

So, continuing this thought, we shall try to explain in a very simple way how the message and the spirit of the Divine Mercy must impregnate the pastoral method of the Church of Christ. Even with the risk of simplifying, we can see three stages in the evangelization work: WELCOME, PROPOSITION, ACCOMPANYING.

WELCOME: expression of the « bowels of mercy ».

Our pastoral job begins with the open arms that welcome, finding its strength in the guts of mercy. We are called upon to partake the same feelings as those in the Heart of Christ, which had felt a pang for these crowds in seeing them like a flock without a shepherd.

Sometimes we have confounded the necessary order and the rigour of our parish pastoral organisation, with the impatient and irritated maximalism. Be careful not to hide the merciful Face of Christ by an accumulation of secondary pastoral norms that we ourselves have elaborated! Take care that our welcome is in no way tarnished by our incapacity to adapt ourselves affectionately and patiently to the different situations that are presented to us by our injured brothers! Obviously I am not speaking about compromising with infidelities concerning the sacraments, far from that... But is it wise to become irritated when welcoming those who are different to us and who knock on our door, for secondary motives such as office hours, baptismal dates or similar questions? Isn't it true that, perhaps, precisely when we relativise the dogmatic aspect in the heart of the Church, we have a tendency to dogmatize as well what is relative? The pastoral style of the Divine Mercy in the Pastoral Welcome is perfectly reflected in the text from Isaiah cited by the evangelists for expressing the actual style of Christ: « He will not break the crushed reed, nor put out the smouldering wick » (Mt 12,19).

Now, Jesus did not limit himself to fulfilling the wishes of those who knocked at his door but he lifted and widened their outlooks. His heart, as a good shepherd, taught with a real pedagogy to the paralytic, whose stretcher was lowered through the roof, that his biggest problem was not his paralysis but his sins (cf Mk 2). That is to say the patient and merciful welcome by the Lord teaches us to place our confidence in HIM. Effectively, the first wishes of man do not always coincide with his deepest requirements. Christ reveals man to himself, and in this processus, he opens his eyes until he perceives what his real necessities are, as in the patient conversation that he has with the Samaritan woman (cf Jn 4).

Finally, our apostolic zeal is the expression of the infinite mercy of Christ's Heart, who loves personally and passionately all the souls that he has confided to us in our pastoral work. This is why, when we are victorious with our human respect, with our laziness, and any other resistance for evangelization, and that we are willing to go forward to meet our prodigal brother, we participate in the bowels of the mercy of the heart of this Father spoken of in the Parable in Saint Luke's gospel (cf Lk 15).

PROPOSITION: be faithful to the Revelation, mercy of God.

There is a mysterious evangelical text which leads us to the following reflection: « Simon, Simon! Satan you must know, has got his wish to sift you all like wheat; but I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail, and once you have recovered, you in your turn must strengthen your brothers » (Lk 22,31-32). Jesus prays in a very special way so that Peter can overcome the temptation, since he has given him the task of strengthening the faith of his brothers. Even more, Peter is Jesus' agent so that the Christians are not estranged from their faith by Satan. The conclusion of the text is clear: God manifests mercy for us and he does not leave us at the mercy of errors but he helps us in our weakness so that we can know and make known the face of the Father revealed by Christ.

Paradoxically, the dominating relativist culture judges negatively the Catholic faith in the Revelation of God. The position of the believer is considered as arrogance, thinking himself holding the truth. On the contrary, the relativist position is considered as being humble. To avoid the danger of intolerance, there is no other remedy than to renounce faith in a pretended revealed religion, trustee of the eternal and absolute truth. Is it so? Are we, by foolishness, going to stop God from being God? Isn't He, HIM, free to exercise his divine sovereignty, by coming to meet man and revealing - through pure mercy - his loving plans? Have we, perhaps, the pretention to tell God how he should go about things? Consequently can there be a more arrogant position than that of relativism reigning in our cultures, which, in the name of tolerance, denies the possibility that God can speak to man and that man can speak in God's name?

Really, the Christian is not the one who possesses the truth. It should rather be said that it is the Truth that possesses him. To be humble is not to doubt in God but let ourselves be loved by the Divine Mercy who looks after us. In these reflections an important conviction emerges which determinates our pastoral methods: give priority to the faithful transmission of the revealed message, where we are not the proprietors but simply the trustees. It would be an enormous error, in the name of some pretended pastoral criterion, that we deform the revealed message. It is certain that the Church is called upon to look for new ways for evangelization, having the capacity for presenting the Gospels to today's men and women, without in any way betraying the depositary confided by Christ, where it is not the proprietor but the humble trustee.

ACCOMPANYING, because his mercy is eternal.

The pastoral style that emerges from the Divine mercy is at the same time both patient and ardent.

Patient: « they went into a Samaritan village to make preparations for him, but the people would not receive him... Seeing this, the disciples James and John said, 'Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven to burn them up?' But he turned and rebuked them, and they went off to another village » (Lk 9,51-56). Sometimes, in our pastoral work, we confound between our apostolic zeal and our hurt pride. Often, the pain of our pastoral failures is not the consequence of a definite search for God's glory but conceals our pride. An apostle of Christ runs the risk of seeking himself, even in the midst of his devotion to his evangelic duty. The mystery of Christ's patience is the best antidote against our pretension to wanting to manipulate the time and the means that God uses. Frequently, man complains in silence to God, whereas in reality, this silence hides the mercy of God.

It is the Divine mercy that refuses to pull out the fig tree that has not given any fruit, and who

bets on man, in the hope that the moment of his conversion will arrive. Christ intercedes for us with the Father: « Sir, leave it for one more year and give me time to dig round it and manure it: it may bear fruit next year; if not, then you can cut it down » (Lk 13,8). In a few words: the pastoral style indicated by the Divine Mercy, is manifested by the patient accompanying, just as much those who refuse to be converted as those who, having already been « touched by Christ » in a « primary conversion », seek the patient teaching of the Mercy of God for their definite sanctification.

Ardent: « I have come to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were blazing already! There is a baptism I must still receive, and how great is my distress till it is over! Do you suppose that I am here to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. For from now on a household of five will be divided: three against two and two against three; the father divided against his son, the son against father, mother against daughter, daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law, daughter-in-law against mother-in-law » (Lk 12,49-53). That is to say that we should not confound patience with indifference or lack of eagerness, as it sometimes happens. It is not advisable to confound the seeking of « peace » with the dubious pretension of avoiding the problems. Incidentally, we know that by opening to Christ the door of our life, the light of his truth uncovers all that was nourished by falsehood. It can even arise that, at the moment of conversion, we find that the encounter with Christ « complicates » life. Like the Hebrews in the desert, we also may feel a certain nostalgia for the onions of Egypt and the tranquillity in which we existed in slavery. Do not be afraid, the authentic peace and joy, that which is given us by the Holy Spirit, is the price for the opening of the doors of our heart to Christ, and we must open them widely. The authentic Peace is that which is founded on truth and justice and not in complaisance to collective ignorance... Such is the Heart of Christ and such must our pastoral style be also: « patient » and « ardent » at the same time...With the true ardour of a loving heart and the true patience of he who never sees a forever lost soul.

Mother of the Divine Mercy

Last Sunday, the second Sunday of Easter, in his message to the faithful assembled at Castegondolfo, the Pope Benedict XVI mentioned John-Paul II and Faustina Kowalska as apostles of the Divine Mercy, inviting us at the same time to place the present Congress under the holy protection of the « Mother of Mercy ». What a marvellous invocation!

- In the litanies of the Rosary, we invoke her as « Mother of Mercy »
- In the Salve, we acclaim her as « Queen and Mother of Mercy »
- In number nine of the encyclical letter *Dives in Misericordia*, John-Paul II reminds us that the Virgin Mary is the one who fully experienced the mystery of the Divine Mercy and he names her expressly as « Mother of Mercy », Mother of the mystery around which the present congress is celebrated. Wouldn't it be fitting to introduce a liturgical fête which will invoke Mary as « Mother of the Divine Mercy »? We recommend ourselves to Her.

Thank you very much for your attention. May God Bless you all!

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