

## Mercy – a lifeblood of our faith and our church

Dear sisters and brothers,

It was a big surprise for me when I was appointed for a missionary of mercy for the Holy Year by Pope Francis. The conferring of the mandate on the Missionaries coming from all over the world on Ash Wednesday this year at the grave of St. Peter in Rome touched and impressed me deeply. We were asked to administer the sacrament of reconciliation, the visible sign of God's mercy, in a special way and with our possibilities in the pastoral work to refer to the tenor of mercy of our faith and our church. That is the first item that Pope Francis called us to follow in life. Mercy needs a face. The heart, the source of mercy, must have hands and feet of people, of you and of me, whether as a priest, a monk or a nun, whether as teachers at work or parents, wherever we live. You and me, we have a "business card" of God for His mercy with our gifts and abilities, with our strong points and weaknesses, a great gift and a great job for us.

The second item that Pope Francis reminds us by the year of mercy, (in Latin: Misericordia), is: We shall have a heart because God has always shown us his mercy. We shall have a heart for people who are feeling lousy. It applies for thousands of years: feed the hungry, soak the thirsty, shelter friends, clothe the naked, care for the sick, visit the prisoners, bury the dead – the Works of Mercy are bearing pillars of a humane society, guarantors of social peace because charity is closely linked to the issue of justice. Jesus takes up this knowledge and makes it a central content of his Testament and timeless order. The story of mercy is a lifeblood, a recurring theme of our church. A wide circle of witnesses is still standing for this until today. Never before in human history there were so many people in need as today. How many people are on the run, looking for fair living conditions? How many people are hit by war, suffer of poverty and misery? The works of mercy must pass a forceful sample; looking away and passing by no longer applies.

Here in Iceland I am grateful for the encouraging testimony that you give as a church, small in numbers, a minority of the population, in the Diaspora. Here I can experience the universal Church and your service also has a great impact on society and the country. People from many nations will find a new home in the Church. With all the concerns, questions and problems people with foreign lifestyles and cultures are an enrichment. Here is the event of Pentecost, the universal Church put in a nutshell, so to speak. You help and stand by each other, also by voluntary services often with long distances to overcome and low financial resources. But the bond of faith in Jesus Christ connects in the depth. Bearing the burden together makes individuals strong or as we say it in the Bonifatiuswerk: "No one should have to believe alone."

The essential core of our faith, our identity is moved closer to the center by Pope Francis. What touches us and finds access into the ventricle of our lives? What is frozen in sympathy in view of sorrow and misery? "Only the one who himself feels pity with the people can praise the mercy of God in worship. There is no devotion, no sacrifice to God without devotion to the people. There is no listening to God without listening to the needs and problems, the hopes and longings of people." (Bishop Franz - Josef Bode, Bishop of Osnabrück). We cannot love God without loving our neighbour. When we worship the body of Christ, the Blessed Sacrament in our churches and monstrances, but overlook the naked, broken body of Christ in the poor and suffering people, our service is in danger of being dishonest. "Whatever you did to the least of my brothers and sisters, you did it to me". Each person is an image of God and bears his dignity. We must treat every person with esteem, respect and mercy. The trust that God meets us with mercy allows us to take over this service for the world, allows us to do works of mercy with our means and our limits.

How would the works of mercy be brought up-to-date? The former bishop of Erfurt in Germany has given us new works of mercy to follow in life. I would like to mention these impulses of him. You will find it as a bookmark on your seats, too, written also in the Icelandic language. These impulses are valuable and compelling. It is good to talk to someone and to let him know:

**You belong to us.** You are not depreciated, even if you are different, you are one of us. A very current work of mercy.

The second: **I listen to you.** There is often a lack of time, to listen to each other. To have time to listen to someone, even with the most modern communications: as urgent as ever.

Thirdly: **I am talking good about you.** Is not the opposite often the case? What we miss today is the esteem of others, a fundamental benevolence, not criticizing everything and denigrating, but being merciful. Of course, sometimes you have to touch on the root of a problem, but the respect of the person should not be missed.

Fourthly: **I'll go a part of the way with you.** For many people a good advice is not helpful. Going along with others so that they get courage and strength to move on. Helping them to seek God, to find answers for their questions and also accompanying them on their journey of faith.

The fifth: **I share with you.** A shared problem is a halved problem, shared joy is double joy. There will not be perfect justice on earth in future. We need help for those who cannot help themselves. The sharing of money and gifts, of means and opportunities will remain necessary.

The sixth: **I visit you.** To visit the other one in his home is better than waiting for him coming to me. A visit creates community. It picks up others from where they feel safe and strong. The visiting culture in our parishes is very precious.

The seventh station is: **I pray for you.** Someone who prays for others is looking at them with different eyes. He meets them in another way. Even non-Christians are grateful if you pray for them. A place in the city, in the village where all the inhabitants are regularly and representatively included in the intercessory prayer, the living and the dead, such a place is a blessing. Tell it as mother, as father to your child: I pray for you! We should do it for one another, especially where there is tension, where relationships are fragile, where words cannot do anything more. God's mercy is greater than our helplessness and grief.

These are the new works of mercy, but they remain as any others a lifeblood of our faith and our church. May God accompany us with His power, to accept this gift and to show outside what we believe inside.

Monsignore Georg Austen

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