

50/2016

Letter to the People of God

of H.L. Mgr. Mario Grech

Bishop of Gozo

THE CRUCIFIX A NARRATIVE OF THE FORBEARANCE AND THE MERCY OF GOD

As many people have become impatient, there is someone whose patience exceeds that of Job. This is our God who never gives up on us humans, who never tires of loving us and showing us mercy. He is the Lord God who “is patient and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in kindness and fidelity.” (Exodus, 34:6).

We have reached the end of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy. I am convinced that many were those who, during this year, discovered this patience of God, were encouraged, approached Him and realised that it was not they who were seeking God but it was God who, driven by mercy, was stalking them. I am sure that some of you are agreeing with me because they had thought that God was disgusted by their behaviour and had distanced Himself from them, but then found Him waiting for them on their doorstep, ready to enter and stay with them the moment they opened the door.

In fact, there are among us some persons who could tell us that, during this year, they had confirmation that God’s mercy was the medicine that healed their conscience that, many times, was infected with hatred, egoism, envy, vendetta and indifference. Who can tell how many people

took the opportunity in this year of grace and approached Jesus, present in the person of a confessor, to empty their sacks and thereby relieved themselves of a heavy burden they had been carrying for many years! What happiness there was in those broken and separated families that grasped the timely opportunity of this Jubilee to make peace! Others availed themselves of the occasion to return, if they could, what they had stolen, and when that was not possible, as in the case of calumny, tried their best to repair the damage they had caused.

We observed that, as invited by Pope Francis “to be merciful like our Father is merciful”, several individuals and communities performed works of mercy. I mention the project we made as a diocese when we received among us a group of adolescents from Iraq and a number of young people had the experience of voluntary work in the missions. Maybe, the proposals I had made, when we inaugurated the Jubilee year, that remained pending¹ will be accepted in the future so that the mercy “from the heart reaches the hands”².

In a certain sense, I can say that this Jubilee inaugurated a new season, not only for many persons, but also for us as Church. Although we have been requested to “close” the door of Mercy that we opened in the Cathedral and in the Sanctuaries of Ta’ Pinu and of the Immaculate Conception, I wish that in future the “door of the Church” remains ajar for everybody. With all patience the Church continues to welcome and accompany those who are seeking mercy, particularly those who feel that there is no place for them in the arms of Mother Church, like those who accepted divorce and have entered into a second relationship; to these and others who separated or have been distanced by our community, we should tell them again that the word “impossible” does not exist in the dictionary of God – that “God himself is a new possibility for us human beings”.

We acknowledge that we do have ready-made rapid solutions to repair any damage we have in our relationship with God. The call of God to us is written in the history of our life with its ups and downs. Therefore we need a lot of patience to realise the path God wants us to follow in our life. It is a fact that sometimes God writes straight on distorted lines. This process takes a long time, and it would not be amiss if we request the help of a qualified person in this search.

Next Sunday, the solemn celebration of Christ the King, Pope Francis will be closing the Jubilee of Mercy in Rome. In union with the Pope, on that day in the afternoon, we shall be making a manifestation in front of the church of the Capuchin Friars, in Victoria. We will gather around the Miraculous Crucifix treasured with devotion by these friars. The theme of this celebration will be the Crucifix, which is a narrative of the mercy and forbearance of God. In the words of St. Bernard, “” from the wounds of crucified Jesus, I suck honey from the cliff and oil from flint rock (see Deut:2,1), in the sense that I taste the goodness of God”.³ The saintly Abbot of Clairvaux continues to say that we can rely only on divine mercy – “our merit is God’s mercy. I am convinced that I will not find myself lacking in merit as long as He is rich in mercy. As the mercy of God is plentiful, so are my merits...and if conscience pricks us because of our many sins, I remember that where sin abounded grace increased”.⁴

Therefore, I call on all the People of God, particularly those who are not yet convinced of God’s tolerance and so did not have the courage to open their hearts to his mercy, to meet with us around the Crucifix on Sunday, 20th of this month, and tell Him what St. Francis once said to one of his superiors: “Make sure that no person on this earth that sins and, after seeing the look in your eyes, does not depart without your forgiveness, if he requests it; and if he does not ask you to forgive him, you yourself should be the one to ask him if he wants forgiveness”.⁵

Given in the Bishop’s Curia, Victoria, Gozo, today, Thursday 10th November 2016.

+ Mario Grech
Bishop of Gozo.

To be read at Masses at the weekend., 12 & 13 of November.

¹ THALLUX IDEJKOM JINTELQU, Omelija tat-13 ta’ Dicembru 2015

² *Katekezi tal-Udjenza tal-Papa Frangisku fl-10 ta’ Awissu 2016*

³ Homily about the Song of Songs, 61,4

⁴ Ibid.,5.

⁵ Letter to the Minister, FF, n235.