

## LIVING FRATERNITY

**Theme: « During this Holy Year, will we be merciful? »**

In the month of March 2016, we are presenting you with some excerpts from the bull on the extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, by our Pope Francis which present the role of the Church and our role in this year.

Recall: At the monthly meeting, the fraternities are invited to always share together one of the passages from the Holy Scriptures (especially the Gospels of the day, or the one from Sunday or any other chosen for a special occasion) as well as the excerpts, mentioned later, from our Rule of life and our General Constitutions.

*Good preparation – Good meeting*

### MARCH 2016 MONTHLY MEETING

**Opening Prayer and Song:** (According to the Ritual or chosen by the Fraternity)

**Reading:** (choose a person who reads calmly)

**Mercy is the very foundation of the Church's life ...** (*Article 10, from the Bull*)

Mercy is the very foundation of the Church's life. All of her pastoral activity should be caught up in the tenderness she make present to believers; nothing in her preaching and in her witness to the world can be lacking in mercy. The Church's very credibility is seen in how she shows merciful and compassionate love. The Church "has an endless desire to show mercy".

Perhaps we have long since forgotten how to show and live the way of mercy. The temptation, on the one hand, to focus exclusively on justice made us forget that this is only the first, albeit necessary and indispensable step. But the Church needs to go beyond and strive for a higher and more important goal. On the other hand, sad to say, we must admit that the practice of mercy is waning in the wider culture. In some cases the word seems to have dropped out of use. However, without a witness to mercy, life becomes fruitless and sterile, as if sequestered in a barren desert. The time has come for the Church to take up the joyful call to mercy once more. It is time to return to the basics and to bear the weaknesses and struggles of our brothers and sisters. Mercy is the force that reawakens us to new life and instils in us the courage to look to the future with hope.

#### **Reflection:**

As a member of the Body of Christ, of the Church, knowing that mercy is the foundation of the life of the Church, what is my personal contribution so that all in the parish community as well as in our fraternities (local and regional) and our families and workplaces or volunteer work be a witness to tenderness. Take some time to reflect on this question. Afterwards, share your reflections.

**The Church is commissioned to announce the mercy of God ...** (*Article 12, from the Bull*)

The Church is commissioned to announce the mercy of God, the beating heart of the Gospel, which in its own way must penetrate the heart and mind of every person. The Spouse of Christ must pattern her behaviour after the Son of God who went out to everyone without exception. In the present day, as the Church is charged with the task of the new evangelization, the theme of mercy needs to be proposed again and again with new enthusiasm and renewed pastoral action. It is absolutely essential for the Church and for the credibility of her message that she herself live and testify to mercy. Her language and her gestures must transmit mercy, as to touch the hearts of all people and inspire them once more to find the road to the Father.

The Church's first truth is the love of Christ. The Church makes herself a servant of this love and mediates it to all people: a love that forgives and expresses itself in the gift of oneself. Consequently, wherever the Church is present, the mercy of the Father must be evident. In our parishes, communities, associations and movements, in a word, wherever there are Christians, everyone should find an oasis of mercy.

**Sharing:**

After the reading of the preceding text, take a few minutes to share your answers to the following questions:

- 1 – Is there, in this call that the Church gives us and in the witness it wants to give to the world, do I see anything that is without mercy? Where and how?
- 2 – When and how do I witness the moments in my life where I have experienced the tenderness of the Church? Do I take the time to share with others my real-life experience of these events linked to the diverse sacramental celebrations: baptisms, marriages, and funerals?
- 3 – Do I appreciate the gestures and words from certain members of the community: from our pastors, pastoral agents? Do I afterwards share these with the members of my family, of my workplace, or elsewhere?

**The pilgrimage ...** (*Article 14, from the Bull*)

The practice of *pilgrimage* has a special place in the Holy Year, because it represents the journey each of us makes in this life. Life itself is a pilgrimage, and the human being is a *viator*, a pilgrim travelling along the road, making his way to the desired destination. Similarly, to reach the Holy Door in Rome or in any other place in the world, everyone, each according to his or her ability, will have to make a pilgrimage. This will be a sign that mercy is also a goal to reach and requires dedication and sacrifice. May pilgrimage be an impetus to conversion by crossing the threshold of the Holy Door, we will find the strength to embrace God's mercy and dedicate ourselves to being merciful with others as the Father has been with us.

*Merciful like the Father*, therefore, is the "motto" of this Holy Year. In mercy, we find proof of how God loves us. He gives his entire self, always, freely, asking nothing in return. He comes to our aid whenever we call upon him. What a beautiful thing that the Church begins her daily prayer with the words, "O God, come to my assistance. O Lord, make haste to help me" (Ps 70:2)! The assistance we ask for is already the first step of God's mercy toward us.

He comes to assist us in our weakness. And his help consists in helping us accept his presence and closeness to us. Day after day, touched by his compassion, we also can become compassionate towards others.

### **Reflection:**

After the reading, take a moment of silence to reflect on the following questions.

- 1 – Do I define myself more by the fact of who I am than for who I am against?  
(By the negative than by the positive)
- 2 – Am I someone who praises rather than one who criticizes? Is there a way to change my attitude?
- 3 – Like Jesus, do I concentrate and see what is good in others regardless of who they are?
- 4 – Am I a witness of mercy towards all?

Take the necessary time to reflect and answer the questions.

### **The season of Lent during the Jubilee Year ... (Article 17, from the Bull)**

The season of Lent during this Jubilee Year should also be lived more intensely as a privileged moment to celebrate and experience God's mercy. How many pages of Sacred Scripture are appropriate for meditation during the weeks of Lent to help us rediscover the merciful face of the Father! We can repeat the words of the prophet Micah and make them our own: You, O Lord, are a God who takes away iniquity and pardons sin, who does not hold your anger forever, but are pleased to show mercy. You, Lord, will return to us and have pity on your people. You will trample down our sins and toss them into the depths of the sea. (cf. 7:18-19)

### **Biblical Research:**

In the preceding text, the prophet Micah is cited. Now, using the Scriptures, go and find examples of mercy and share your findings. (About 20 minutes)

### **Biblical Reflection:**

Note: If you prefer sharing on the Gospel of the day, or on Sunday's Gospel, take the time necessary to read and internalize it, then if you wish, share your reflections using one or two of the following questions:

1. What does this gospel teach us?
2. To whom does it speak?
3. How does it reach us personally?
4. Is it as message of hope? Other kind of message? Why and how is it?

### **In the Footsteps of Francis**

*(Excerpt from the Letter to the Faithful, verses 28-29, Écrits, Claire et François, Éditions du Cerf, Paris 2003)*

That those who have received the power to judge others exercise the judgment with mercy, as they would obtain themselves the Lord's mercy. The judgment, in effect, will be mercy for those who have not made mercy.

## **Deepening of points taken from the Rule and the General Constitutions**

### **Rule 7**

United by their vocation as "brothers and sisters of penance, and motivated by the dynamic power of the gospel, let them confirm their thoughts and deeds to those of Christ by means of that radical interior change which the gospel itself calls "conversion." Human frailty makes it necessary that this conversion be carried out daily.

On this road to renewal the sacrament of reconciliation is the privileged sign of the Father's mercy and the source of grace.

## **General Constitutions**

### **Article 13.1**

Secular Franciscans, called in earlier times "the brothers and sisters of penance", propose to live in the spirit of continual conversion. Some means to cultivate this characteristic of the Franciscan vocation, individually and in fraternity, are: listening to and celebrating the Word of God; review of life; spiritual retreats; the help of a spiritual adviser, and penitential celebrations. They should approach the Sacrament of Reconciliation frequently and participate in the communal celebration of it, whether in the fraternity, or with the whole people of God.

### **Life – Objective:**

During the month of March, in this Year of mercy, take the time to live this Paschal season with more fervour and gratefulness for what the Lord has done for us ...

## **Events and Information from the Church and the Order**

Remind the members of regional and local activities.

**End of the meeting:** ( a prayer or song chosen by the fraternity)

## **At home**

The following article 18 of the bull presents what Pope Francis proposes to do in this Holy Year.

During Lent of this Holy Year, I intend to send out *Missionaries of Mercy*. They will be a sign of the Church's maternal solicitude for the People of God, enabling them to enter the profound richness of this mystery so fundamental to the faith. There will be priests to whom I will grant the authority to pardon even those sins reserved to the Holy See, so that the breath of their mandate as confessors will be even clearer. They will be above all, living signs of the Father's readiness to welcome those in search of his pardon. They will be missionaries of mercy because they will be facilitators of a truly human encounter, a source of liberation, rich with responsibility for overcoming obstacles and taking up the new life of Baptism again. They will be led in their mission by the word of the Apostle: " For God has consigned all men to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon all" (Rom 11:32). Everyone, in fact, without exception, is called to embrace the call to mercy. May these Missionaries live this call with the assurance that they can fix their eyes on Jesus, " the merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God" (Heb 2:17).