

God's mercy rejects no one

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'Embrace of the prodigal son' by Antoine Kniehbily ssc

Dear brothers and sisters,

We are already in the midst of the Lenten season which speaks to us of God's patient and merciful love, a love which always seeks to help us and awaits our return. By welcoming him anew, we come to radiate him in our lives, in our preaching, in the Gospel lived in our communities and in our pastoral service. We make this Lenten journey in the Church and in solidarity with our world, together with all our brothers and sisters who are our companions along the way.

In this month of March we also remember our founder, the Good Father on his *dies natalis in coelo* giving thanks for his intercessory presence before the Lord for all of us, along with the Good Mother and so many brothers and sisters of the congregation.

Just as these 40 days of Lent speak to us of God's patient and merciful love, so too our founders knew how to translate the depth of God's merciful love manifested in the hearts of Jesus and Mary into a certain style of community life and mission.

In the second "report" of the presentation of the congregation to the Holy See for approval (26th December 1814), Hilarion Lucas ssc, described how its aims, sources and style of life and mission are all inseparably united. Its aim is none other than to seek the glory of God and the salvation of souls. The privileged means to achieve this end is the promotion of devotion to the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary. This devotion – possessing the dynamism and logic of the incarnation – translates, first of all, into an understanding of Jesus and Mary, and then into certain distinctive features of a way of being in the Church, and finally into an understanding of the congregation.

Regarding the understanding of Jesus and Mary, Hilarion affirms: "To adore the divine Heart of Jesus, to honour the Sacred Heart of Mary, is to pay a tribute of homage, gratitude and love for the infinite charity of the Saviour of humankind and for the ineffable tenderness that Mary has for the adopted brothers and sisters of her divine Son". This understanding of Jesus and Mary embraces all dimensions of human existence, and by its very content, transforms entirely the life of those who cooperate with this grace. Such a transformation is first expressed in a way of being Church, with features that seek to make transparent what the brothers and sisters have contemplated in Jesus and Mary.

"The goodness of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary does not allow them to reject sinners". Further on he writes: "Neither the divine liberator who died for humankind, nor the Queen of Peace whom the Church calls the refuge of sinners, reject lost sheep". Thus, the depth of the liberating love of Jesus and the unconditional tenderness of Mary move the brothers and sisters to a way of being community, which is characterised by a concrete mercy shown towards sinners and an effective welcoming of the weakest, of those who are distanced from God, from their Churches and sometimes from their very own selves. These are the characteristic ways of being community and building up the Church which spring from the transformation that takes place in those who enter into the Hearts of Jesus and Mary.

Another expression of this transformation is manifested in the experience and understanding of the congregation. What we have understood from Jesus and Mary and expressed in a merciful form of Church, also presupposes a diligent coherence in the internal relationships and mission of the congregation.

"We believe that divine mercy denies no one the necessary help in terms of redemption and salvation, that Jesus Christ shed his blood for all and for each one in particular. We also know that Providence sometimes makes use of the weakest to bring about the salvation and conversion of souls. Full of confidence that a God full of goodness would deign to receive our offering, we have consecrated our institution and our persons to this good work".

Hilarion thus reflects an awareness of the smallness and weakness of the congregation. However, since the mission to which its members consecrate themselves is, above all, the Work of God, such smallness not only does not prevent them, but rather stimulates them, in the first place, to make themselves even more available to the Providential action of God who sustains and carries forward his work, all the while counting on us. And secondly, we are impelled to place not only our best energies and resources but also our individual and institutional weaknesses and poverty in the hands of the Good God so that He may make them fruitful.

Congregation: What do you have to say about yourself today?

This text of Hilarion brings us closer to the figure of our founders and the grace they received for the Church and the world. It is true that Hilarion is part of the founding group of the congregation. He is a privileged witness of its birth and first development. However, his work then remains valid for us today. He replies to the questions that are also ours: What is it today that animates the religious men and women and secular branch of the congregation? What is our mission in the Church and in the world? What style of community and Church life witnesses credibly to the message we proclaim? How can we discover the grace that awaits us when we recognise ourselves, individually and as a body, as co-workers with the Lord called to carry forward his work? In other words, his report answers the question: "Dear congregation, what do you have to say about yourself?"

In many places we see the urgent need to renew our pastoral presence, or a desire in many members to be present in new margins: young people, the poor, Amazonia, the big cities, etc. For this to be effective, we will have to leave some things behind, or at least organise ourselves or our work differently, with the laity, in a more synodal way.

Accordingly, the work that Hilarion undertook in his time can help us to answer these questions today. Each one of us, together with the brothers and lay people with whom we journey, is called to drink from the gift of the spirit that the founders received, a gift that they communicated to the founding community and which continues to be available today. We are called to seek and decide together, with creativity and imagination and trust in the Lord, how we can be useful to God acting in the world, regardless of the age or abilities of each one of us. The Lord counts on each and every one of us. No one is surplus to requirements or should feel dispensed from them.

During this Lenten season and animated by the apostolic spirit of our founders, may the Lord ensure in each one of us, in our religious and pastoral communities, that his mercy excludes no one, but embraces and accompanies each and every person. May we be joyful and contagious witnesses of this good news.

Faternally,

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