

The Year of Mercy ends

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For the reception of
children from Africa who
need specialized
surgery.

“A wish changes nothing. An action changes all”. This is the message I came across a few days ago on an advertisement board in the Lisbon airport, while I was waiting for the return flight to Madrid. (Alberto Toutin and I are making the canonical visit of the Iberian Province). The advertisement tried to sell us a stunning car. For me, it made me think of the jubilee year of mercy that will close within a few days.

Mercy is action, not speech or feelings. This jubilee year ought to have been the year of works of mercy. Pope Francis told us at the beginning of the year that the works of mercy are “a way to reawaken our conscience, too often grown dull in the face of poverty. And let us enter more deeply into the heart of the Gospel where the poor have a special experience of God’s mercy” (*Misericordiae Vultus*, 15). For my part, I invite you to finish this jubilee picking up again on the invitation to action in two directions:

1. Towards the brothers

The most difficult part of religious life is communion among the brothers. We will always find reasons – sometimes lofty and religious – to distance ourselves from others, to justify our desire to walk alone, to exempt ourselves from the common

commitment. The call to fraternal affection, endearment and humility (cf. 1 Pt 3:8) often falls on deaf ears. It is difficult for us to look at each other with kindness of heart.

However, "Closeness does all of us good. Distance, on the other hand, makes us sick." (Pope Francis, interview on the occasion of the visit to Lund for the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, October 31, 2016). Our religious life is often sick with the distance between the brothers. It would seem that the "enemy" (the "devil", that is to say, that which divides) were gaining the upper hand on us. Our division discredits the message of faith that we try to transmit. If we do not love each other, the Gospel is not true. Let us finish the year of mercy with actions that draw us closer to our brothers.

2. Towards those who suffer most

Our mission urges us to proclaim the Gospel (cf. Constitutions 6), to talk about Jesus, to support the faith of those who believe, to collaborate in the mysterious process of the transmission of the faith. But, at the same time and without any hint of contradiction with the above, our consecration moves us to live as disciples of Jesus. And what does the disciple of Jesus do when faced with the suffering of his brothers and sisters? The disciple acts. He doesn't just reason, preach or exhort, rather he gets close to the one who suffers, touches him, gets involved in his fate, and works with him. These are works of mercy.

Many say that our religious life is "comfortably restless". That is to say, we are religious with good hearts, anxious, desirous of easing the pain of the poor, moved by the tragedies that plague humanity. But at the same time we are so settled in an unquestioned comfort that, when all is said and done, we do not manage to become neighbor of those who remain at the margins and are rejected. Furthermore, often we are so well appreciated by those people that we serve and we receive such a positive image of what we are and what we do, that it seems the Gospel might have lost its ability to disturb us, to create unrest, to rip open our heart.

We need to convert ourselves towards the poor in order to wake up from this lethargy. This conversion will only happen through works of mercy. We, as religious, can and must live these works in an exaggerated way as Damian did. Let us end the year of mercy with acts that make us touch the suffering flesh of Christ in our poorest brothers and sisters. From there will come our redemption.

