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Jubilee audience: almsgiving, an essential aspect of mercy

Vatican City, 9 April 2016 – During today's Jubilee audience the Pope spoke about an essential aspect of mercy, almsgiving – a gesture that must not be divested of the great content it possesses and which, like mercy, may be expressed in many ways.

Addressing the forty thousand people present in St. Peter's Square, the Holy Father commented that almsgiving is as ancient as the Bible and, along with sacrifice, was one of the duties religious people were obliged to perform. "There are important pages in the Old Testament", he said, "in which God demands special attention to the poor who may be the destitute, orphans and widows. In the Bible, this is a recurrent theme: the needy, the widow, the foreigner, the outsider, the orphan, as God wants His people to look at these brothers of ours. Indeed, I would say that they are at the very centre of His message: praise God with sacrifice, praise God with almsgiving. Along with the obligation to remember them, a valuable instruction is given: 'Give generously to them and without a grudging heart'. This means that charity requires, first of all, an attitude of inner joy. Offering mercy cannot be a burden or a nuisance we hasten to free ourselves from. How many people justify themselves in not giving alms by saying, 'But what will happen if I give to him? Perhaps he will go and buy wine to get drunk'. But if he drinks, it is because he has no other way. And you, what do you do behind closed doors, where no-one sees? And you judge this poor man who asks you for some money to buy a glass of wine?"

The Pope went on to cite the wise lesson in the Old Testament that the elderly Tobit gives on the value of almsgiving, after receiving a large sum of money: "Give alms from your possessions. Do not turn your face away from any of the poor, so that God's face will not be turned away from you". In the New Testament, Jesus gives us invaluable teaching in this respect. First, He tells us not to give alms so as to be lauded for our generosity. "It is not the appearance that counts, but rather the capacity to stop and to look in the face of the person who asks for help. We can all ask ourselves, 'Am I able to stop and look in the face, look in the eyes, the person who is asking me for help?'. We must not therefore identify almsgiving simply with the money offered hastily, without looking at the person and without stopping to speak to understand what they truly need. At the same time, we must distinguish between the poor and the various forms of begging that do not perform a good service to those who are genuinely poor".

In summary, almsgiving is a sincere gesture of love and attention "towards those we meet and who ask us for help, performed secretly so that only God sees and understands the value of the act", But giving alms must also

be a sacrifice, and to truly involve oneself with the poor, we must also give something that is ours. "I go without something of my own to give it to you", said the Pope, concluding with the words of St. Paul: "In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'".

Following his catechesis in Italian, the Pope greeted the faithful of different nationalities present in St. Peter's Square, including pilgrims from the archdiocese of Dublin, Ireland; groups from Pontal and the Colegio San Benito of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; delegations from various Italian dioceses and pilgrimages from the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, of Caritas of Casale Monferrato and the Italian Federation of Catholic Seminaries, celebrating the 50th anniversary of their founding; the young people of Profession of the Faith, Tivoli; and the sick assisted by UNITALSI in the Lombardy and Campania regions.
