

HOLY SEE PRESS OFFICE
OFICINA DE PRENSA DE LA SANTA SEDE



BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIEGE
PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHLIS

BOLLETTINO

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N. 161116a

Wednesday 16.11.2016

General audience: bear patiently those who wrong us, without forgetting our own flaws

“We dedicate today’s catechesis to a work of mercy that we all know very well, but perhaps do not put into practice as we should: bearing patiently those who wrong us”, said Pope Francis to the thousands of faithful gathered in St. Peter’s Square during this week’s Wednesday general audience. “We are all very good at identifying the presence of a person who is bothersome: it happens when we meet someone in the street, or when we receive a telephone call. Immediately we think, ‘For how long must I listen to the complaints, gossip, requests or bragging of this person?’ At times, it may be that annoying people are those closest to us: among our relatives there is always one; they are not lacking in the workplace; and even in our spare time we are not free of them”.

“What must we do with these people?” asked the Holy Father, without neglecting to mention that we too can be bothersome to others. He went on to explain why patiently bearing those who wrong us appears among the spiritual works of mercy.

“In the Bible we see that God Himself must use mercy to suffer the complaints of His people”, he said. “For example, in the Book of Exodus the people are truly unbearable: first they weep because they are enslaved in Egypt, and God frees them; then in the desert they complain because there is nothing to eat, and God sends them quails and manna, but in spite of this the complaints do not cease. Moses acts as a mediator between God and His people, and he too at times is bothersome to the Lord. But God was patient and in this way He taught Moses and His people also this essential dimension of faith”.

“A first question therefore comes to us spontaneously”, he added. “Do we ever carry out an examination of conscience, to ask ourselves whether or not we too, at times, can be annoying to others? It is easy to point the finger at the defects and shortcomings of others, but we should learn to put ourselves in other people’s shoes. Let us look above all at Jesus: how much patience He had to have during the three years of His public life! Once, while He was walking with His disciples, He was stopped by the mother of James and John, who said to Him, ‘Promise that in your kingdom these two sons of mine will sit on your right and on your left’. Even in that situation, Jesus took the opportunity to give a fundamental teaching: His is not a kingdom of power and glory like earthly ones, but rather of service and giving to others. Jesus teaches always to go towards the essential and to look further ahead, to assume one’s mission with responsibility”.

The situation narrated in the Gospel of Matthew relates to another two works of spiritual mercy: admonishing sinners and instructing the ignorant. “Let us think of the great effort it takes when we help people to grow in faith and in life. I think, for example, of catechists – among whom there are many mothers and women religious – who dedicate time to teaching children the basic elements of faith. How much effort, especially when the children would prefer to play instead of listening to the catechism!”.

“Accompanying in the search for the essential is good and important, as it lets us share in the joy of tasting the meaning of life. Often it happens that we meet people who dwell on superficial things, ephemeral and banal; at times they have not met anyone to stimulate them to look for something else, to appreciate the true treasures. Teaching to look to the essential is a decisive help, especially in a time like our own, which seems to have lost its bearings and pursues short-sighted satisfactions. Teaching to discover what the Lord wants from us and how we can respond to it means setting out on the road to grow in our own vocation, the road of true joy”.

“So, Jesus’ words to the mother of James and John, and then to all the group of disciples, indicate the way to avoid so as not to fall into the trap of envy, ambition and adulation, temptations that are always lurking even amongst us Christians. The need to advise, admonish and instruct must not make us feel superior to others, but obliges us first and foremost to look inwardly at ourselves to check that we are consistent with what we ask of others. Let us not forget Jesus’ words: ‘Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?’. He concluded, “May the Holy Spirit help us be patient in bearing others, and humble and simple in giving counsel”.
