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Message of the Holy Father for the 800th anniversary of the Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mercy

The following is the Message sent by the Holy Father to the Rev. Fr. Juan Carlos Saavedra Lucho, Master General of the Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mercy, on the occasion of the 800th anniversary of the Mercedarian Order.

Message of the Holy Father

To the Most Reverend Father Fray Juan Carlos Saavedra Lucho

Master General of the Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mercy

Dear brother:

As we approach the date on which the Order of Mercy, and all those who unite to it with spiritual bonds, remember the eighth centenary of the pontifical confirmation of this institute by Pope Gregory IX, I want to join you in your thanksgiving to the Lord for all the gifts received during this time. I wish to express to you my spiritual closeness, encouraging you so that this circumstance may serve for inner renewal and to promote the charism received, following the spiritual path that Christ the Redeemer has outlined for you.

The Lord is present in our lives, showing us all His love, and He encourages us to respond with generosity, since this is the first commandment of the holy People of God: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (*Dt 6: 5*). In preparation for this jubilee year, you wanted to highlight three key figures in your history that can signify three moments in response to God's love. The first is *Saint Peter Nolasco*, considered the founder of the new community and the repository of the charism given by God. In that vocation there is the heart and treasure of the Order, since both its tradition and the life story of each religious are based on that first love. In the rich heritage of the Mercedarian family, initiated with the founders and enriched by the members of the community that have followed over the centuries, all the spiritual and material graces that you have received are brought together. This heritage becomes an expression of a story of love that is rooted in the past but above all, is incarnated in the present and open to the future, in the

gifts that the Spirit continues to pour out today on each one of you. You can not love what you do not know (see Saint Augustine, *Trinity*, X, II, 4), so I encourage you to look more deeply at that foundation laid by Christ, outside of which nothing can be built, rediscovering the first love of the Order and of the vocation, to renew them continuously.

The second protagonist in this triptych is the *Holy Virgin*, Our Lady of Mercy or, as they also call her, Remedy and Grace in our needs, we pray to God and trust in His powerful intercession. In the original Hebrew the expression we translate as “you will love the Lord your God with all your heart” has the meaning of “unto the last drop of our blood”. Therefore, the example of Mary is identified with this verse of the “*Shema*”. She proclaims herself as the “servant of the Lord”, and “hurried” (*Lk* 1: 38-39) to take the good news of the kingdom to her cousin Elizabeth. It is God’s response to the cry of the people who await liberation (cf *Ex* 3: 7 and *Lk* 1: 13). Thus, she is a teacher of consecration to God and to the people, in willingness and service, in the humility and simplicity of a hidden life, totally dedicated to God, in silence and in prayer. It is a commitment that evokes the sacrifice of the ancient redeeming fathers, who themselves remained “hostage”, as a pledge to obtain the freedom of the captives. Therefore, I beg you that this purpose of being completely His is reflected not only in your vanguard apostolic works, but in the daily and humble work of each religious, as well as in the contemplative monasteries that, with the prayerful silence and in hidden sacrifice, maternally sustain the life of the Order and the Church.

The third protagonist who completes the picture of the Institute’s history is Christ the Redeemer; in Him we make a qualitative leap, because we pass from the disciples to the Master. Like the rich young man, Jesus challenges us with a question that touches us deeply: Do you want to be perfect? (*Mt* 19: 21, 5: 48). It is not about theoretical knowledge, nor even sincere adherence to the precepts of the divine Law “from youth” (*Mk* 10: 20); but Jesus looks us in the eyes and loves us, asking us to leave everything to follow Him. Love is appraised in the fire of risk, in the ability to put all the cards on the table and to stake everything, for that hope that does not disappoint. However, very often, the personal and community decisions that cost us the most are those that affect our small and, sometimes, worldly securities. We are all called to live the joy that springs from the encounter with Jesus, to overcome our selfishness, to leave behind our own comfort and to dare to reach out to all the peripheries in need of the light of the Gospel (cf *Evangelii gaudium*, 20). We can respond to the Lord with generosity when we experience that we are loved by God despite our sin and our inconsistency.

Dear brothers and sisters, the Lord Jesus shows us a beautiful way, to follow with a renewed spirit. You can nurture the gift you have received – personally and as a community – giving it and giving yourselves completely, like the grain of wheat that, if it does not die, cannot bear fruit (cf *Jn* 12: 24). I ask the Lord to give you the strength to abandon what binds you and to assume your cross, so that, throwing aside your cloak and taking up your mat (*Mk* 10: 50; 2: 1-12), you will be able to follow Him along the way and dwell in His house for ever.

Please, I beg you, do not forget to pray for me. May Jesus bless all the members of the Order and the entire Mercedarian family, and the Holy Virgin keep you.

Fraternally,

FRANCISCUS PP.

The Vatican, 6 December 2017

Memorial of Saint Peter Paschal