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General audience: end of the cycle of catechesis on mercy

With two works of mercy, both corporal – burying the dead – and spiritual – praying to God for the living and the dead – the Holy Father concluded the cycle of catechesis dedicated to mercy. However, he noted, “the catechesis comes to an end, but mercy must continue”.

“The final work of corporal mercy that invites us to bury the dead may seem a strange request”, Francis observed, “and yet, in some areas of the world that live under the scourge of war, with bombings that sow fear and claim innocent victims, this work is sadly relevant. The Bible has as good example of this: that of the elderly Tobias, who, risking his own life, buries the dead despite the King’s prohibition. Today too there are those who risk their lives to bury the poor victims of war. So, this work of corporal mercy is not far from our daily existence. And it makes us think about what happens on Good Friday, when ... Joseph of Arimathea comes. He was a rich man and a member of the Sanhedrin, but became a disciple of Jesus and offered for Him his new tomb, excavated in the rock. He went personally to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus: a true work of mercy carried out with great courage. For Christians, burial is an act of pity but also of great faith. We lay in the tomb the body of our loved ones, in the hope of their resurrection. This is a rite that remains very strongly felt and in our people, and which finds special resonance in this month of November, dedicated in particular to the remembrance of and prayer for the departed”.

“To pray for the dead is, first and foremost, a sign of acknowledgement of their witness and of the good they have done. It is a thanksgiving to the Lord for having given them to us, and for their love and friendship. The Church prays for the dead in a special way during the Holy Mass. ... A simple and effective remembrance, full of meaning, since it entrusts our loved ones to God’s mercy. Let us pray with Christian hope that they be with Him in paradise, awaiting that we meet again in that mystery of love that we do not understand, but which we know to be true as it is promise that Jesus has made to us”.

However, the remembrance of the departed faithful must not make us forget to pray also for the living, who along with us every day face the trials of life. “The need for this prayer is even more evident if we place it in the light of the profession of faith that says, ‘I believe in the communion of saints’. It is the mystery that expresses the beauty of the mercy that Jesus has revealed to us. Indeed, the communion of saints indicates that we are all immersed in the life of God and live in His love. All of us, living and dead, are in communion, that is, in the community of those who have received Baptism, who have been nourished by the Body of Christ, and form part

of the great family of God”.

“How many different ways there are to pray for our neighbour!” he exclaimed. “They are all valid and accepted by God if they are done with the heart”. He went on to mention mothers and fathers who bless their children in the morning and the evening; the prayer for the sick; and silent intercession in many difficult situations. In this context, he spoke about a businessman who attended Mass at Santa Marta yesterday, who is forced to close down his factory as business is not good. The businessman was troubled as he did not want to leave more than fifty families without an income, even though he could declare the company bankrupt and avert difficulties for himself. “This is a good Christian”, said Francis, “who goes to Mass to pray that the Lord help him find a way out, not only for him, but for the other fifty families. This is a man who knows how to pray with the heart and with works; he knows how to pray for others”.

The Pope also spoke about another form of prayer, of thanksgiving for good news regarding a friend, a relative or a colleague. “This too is praying for others”, he said. “Thanking God when things go well. At times, as St. Paul tells us, ‘we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words’. Let us open, then, our heart, so that the Holy Spirit, seeing the desires that reside in its depths, may purify them and bring them to fruition. However, for us and for others, let us always ask that God’s will be done, as in the Lord’s Prayer, since His will is surely the greatest good, the good of a Father Who never abandons us”.

“Concluding this catechesis on mercy, let us pledge to pray for each other so that the corporal and spiritual works of mercy increasingly become our style of life. The catechesis, as I said at the beginning, ends here. We have looked at all fourteen works of mercy, but mercy continues and we must exercise it in these fourteen ways”.
