



Pope tells Missionaries of Mercy their service is precious for the Church



During an audience with some 550 Missionaries of Mercy in the Vatican, Pope Francis reaffirmed them in their mission saying they provide a much needed service to the Church and warned them that the Christian path is an arduous one, "with stones upon which to stumble and banana peels on which to slip".

By Sr Bernadette Mary Reis, fsp

The Missionaries of Mercy are meeting in Rome for a few days of prayer and reflection organized by the Pontifical Council for the New Evangelization.

During an audience with Pope Francis on Tuesday, he told them that they are providing a much needed service to the Church.

Although his initial intention was that their mandate would cover only the Jubilee of Mercy, the Pope told them that he had decided to prolong their service because of the many testimonies of conversion attributed to their service.

He said he intended his reflections to be supportive of the responsibility that he had given to them so that the expression of the "ministry of mercy" that they are called to live might be improved.

Message of Mercy

Pope Francis told them that "the message that we bear in Christ's name is that of making peace with God.... God needs people to bring the message of his pardon and mercy to the world." This is the

mission that Jesus entrusted to his apostles the evening of his resurrection. The lives of those who fulfill such a mission must be in harmony with it, the Pope reminded them “To be collaborators of mercy, therefore, presupposes to live the merciful love which we ourselves have first received.”

St Paul: the mirror for the true Missionary of Mercy

The Pope reflected substantially on the experience of St Paul who acknowledging his past as a “blasphemer and persecutor...received mercy” (1 Tm 1:13) from the Lord. Because of his past he became an ambassador of God’s reconciliation (2 Cor 5:20), and declared that he gave scandal to no one so that his ministry would not be discredited (2 Cor 6:3). The key to collaborate with God is that one always acknowledge that “God has treated me mercifully,” the Pope said.

God makes the first move

Some concrete advice the Pope gave was that priests should remember that God makes the first move. Thus, when a penitent approaches the Sacrament of Reconciliation, they need to remember that God’s grace is already at work. “Our priestly heart should perceive the miracle of the person who has encountered God and who has already experienced the efficacy of his grace,” he said.

The priests’ work is the second move

The Pope explained that the priests’ cooperation in God’s grace already at work consists in “the not rendering vain the action of the grace of God, but to sustain it, and allow it to come to perfection.” Like the father of the prodigal son, confessors need to look in the eyes of the penitent, listen to them, and throw open wide their arms to welcome them, so that they can experience the love of the Father “who forgives no matter what, clothes the son with the festal garment and the ring which is a sign that he belongs to his family.”

The path is slippery

Departing from his text, Pope Francis told the priests to encourage penitents and give them hope, letting them know they don't need to be embarrassed if they need to return to Confession--"because the path is strewn with rocks and banana peels that make you slip," he quipped.

In conclusion, Pope Francis said “Living in communion with the Source of Life, Missionaries of Mercy are called to be interpreters of and to bear testimony to this experience: that everyone is always welcome without distinction into the community that sustains those who find themselves in a moment of need or difficulty.”