



Pope to Missionaries of Mercy: Show the face of God's boundless mercy to all



VATICAN NEWS

Pope Francis welcomes Missionaries of Mercy from around the world, and encourages them to receive warmly those seeking God's mercy and to offer consolation to the sad and lonely, offering the biblical figure Ruth as an inspiration for their ministry.

By Thaddeus Jones

Welcoming the Missionaries of Mercy from around the world in the Paul VI Audience Hall on Monday, Pope Francis explained how he wanted to bring them back to Rome as a way to renew their ministry of being instruments of God's mercy.

Saying their ministry is the one closest to his heart, the Pope recalled that he even had their fundamental role included in the new Apostolic Constitution on the Roman Curia, "*Praedicate Evangelium*", under the section focusing on evangelization.

He said they are now part of the structure of the Church, and hopefully will grow in number as Bishops identify priests "who are holy, merciful, ready for forgiveness, in order to become full-fledged missionaries of Mercy."

Pope Francis instituted the role of the Missionaries of Mercy six years ago when he met them in Rome during the Jubilee Year of Mercy in 2016 to give them their mandate to witness around the world the closeness of God and His love, mercy and forgiveness.

The Missionaries of Mercy offer a special ministry of outreach, hearing confessions and finding new ways to proclaim, express and bring God's mercy to all. They also have special faculties to give absolution to serious sins that ordinarily would require consultation and permission from the local bishop or the Holy See.

The testimony of Ruth

Pointing to previous meetings with the Missionaries of Mercy, the Pope recalled how he encouraged them to bring God's mercy and be a sign of His consolation so that they know God never forgets or abandons us.

On this occasion, he reflected on the biblical figure of Ruth, who can inspire them in their ministry. The Book of Ruth in the Old Testament tells the story of a Moabite woman committed to the people of Israel through an oath to her mother-in-law Naomi. Both were widows living in extreme poverty.

The Pope spoke about Ruth's very difficult life, suffering as a poor widow and foreigner, but despite it all offering heroic love, loyalty, generosity and mercy in her service to Naomi and others. She became the great-grandmother of David through her later marriage to Boaz of Bethel, and so a full part of the people of ancient Israel.

God communicates through Ruth

Pope Francis observed how, in the Book of Ruth, God never speaks directly, but He communicates through Ruth's every gesture of kindness towards her mother-in-law Naomi.

While the path of life is often difficult and full of sadness at times, God sets out on his path to reveal His love, the Pope explained, saying we too are invited to discern the presence of God in people's lives.

And as Missionaries of Mercy, "it is up to us, through our ministry, to give voice to God and show the face of His mercy." He added that God works in people's daily lives often through silent, discreet and simple ways manifested through those who become a sacrament of God's presence.

Forgiveness in your pocket

The Pope appealed to the Missionaries of Mercy to avoid every form of judgement when receiving those coming to them and to always strive to understand the person fully, not just partially.

We are all sinners, he noted, and we all fall on our knees to ask for forgiveness, the Pope pointed out. And departing from this prepared text, he encouraged them not to get bogged down in what the rules say, but to look at the person asking for forgiveness and to be generous with that forgiveness "in your pocket," as priests and Missionaries of Mercy.

He called them to "look into the heart of a person, where the desire is hidden, and the longing to return to the Father and to his house." He added for emphasis, "always, always forgive!"

Mercy and consolation

In conclusion, Pope Francis encouraged the Missionaries of Mercy to always be ready to show God's mercy, like having a blanket always ready to warm those who seek to come in from the cold and receive God's mercy and forgiveness.

He called on them to be generous like Ruth, to draw near with consolation to those who are sad and lonely, adding that in this way the Lord will recognize them as His faithful ministers.

The Pope added two stories off-the-cuff about two great confessors he remembered from his experience back home in Argentina. He spoke about how they heard confessions all day long until the last years of their lives as examples of showing God's boundless mercy in the confessional.

He encouraged the Missionaries of Mercy to do the same - to never tire of forgiving, "because the Lord never tires of forgiving us, never!"

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