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Audio of Prelate: Clothing the Naked and Visiting the Imprisoned

A new audio in the series on the corporal and spiritual works of mercy.

03/02/2016

Translation of the Prelate's audio recording is found below.

To listen to the 9-minute audio in Spanish click [here](#).

We reflect this month on two corporal works of mercy that address different types of poverty: those who lack clothes and those who lack freedom.

Clothing the naked means not only protecting the body from the weather; it also means helping a person to maintain his or her dignity. One's way of dressing makes it possible, for every man and woman, to present oneself properly before others, and is often a reflection of a Christian's inner beauty.

In meditating on the Passion of our Lord, it is evident that Christ suffers the injustices of men. No one, except his Mother and a few others, offers him a gesture of mercy at the hour of the crucifixion. They even take his clothes, and raffle them off among the soldiers. When Jesus called us to clothe the naked, he knew that even this gesture of mercy would not be

granted to Him. The nakedness of Christ on the Cross is the image of the absence of mercy on the part of us men and women: our lack of love, the coldness caused by our sins and selfishness.

We can somehow make amends now with our fellow men for what happened on Golgotha. Even in affluent societies, the number of people without the material means to have decent clothes and to dress normally is not small. This Jubilee offers us another opportunity to “open our eyes to the misery of the world,” and to discover the people in need who are quite near to us. We can contribute in various ways, with our time or money, to charities that provide decent clothing to those in need, or even help to begin one.

Moreover, in a society that can tend to make people slaves to fashion, this is also a good opportunity to donate

to charity money that might have been spent on clothes we don't really need, while taking better care of the clothing we already have. We should also try to set a good example by our unpretentious and dignified appearance.

We can also practice this work of mercy by helping, with charity, respect and patience, those who lower their own dignity by their way of dressing, owing to a poverty of ideals or proper guidance. Suggesting to someone that they not follow certain styles that represent bad or doubtful taste is an especially important educational task for parents with respect to their children, and for any person with respect to his or her friends. Each of us is a daughter or son of God, and how we dress is part of how we recognize our own dignity. Let us make clear that clothing is meant to cover a body with a spiritual soul,

the most important element, and that the body is destined for a glorious resurrection.

Another unmistakable work of mercy is going to visit the imprisoned. We again turn our eyes to Christ: the Lord of the Earth was held captive the night prior to his crucifixion. How bitter those hours must have been! They deprived Jesus of freedom as He awaited trial for an absolutely unjust and false condemnation. Paradoxically, in an act of complete freedom, that Prisoner, despised by all, was freeing us from sin. And he did not disdain to carry out this service because he is the Son of God, and brother to all men and women.

Those who are deprived of freedom need to be comforted in hope. Therefore the Popes, including Pope Francis, have often gone to visit prisoners, offering words of

encouragement, and inviting them to take advantage of this situation to open their lives to God. “When Jesus becomes part of our life,” Pope Francis said while visiting a prison in Bolivia, “we can no longer remain imprisoned by our past. Instead, we begin to look to the present, and we see it differently, with a different kind of hope. We begin to see ourselves and our lives in a different light. We are no longer stuck in the past, but capable of shedding tears and finding in them the strength to make a new start.”

Visiting prisoners, or helping them to reintegrate in society, is to serve those who have been alienated from society. What a beautiful work can be done by those who carry out or assist in this task! Especially by attending to those who are prisoners for religious reasons, which is so frequently the case today.

Let us also think of those who are enclosed in prisons not made of cement, but behind bars of another kind: bars that have their origin in alcohol, pornography, drugs, or other vices that shackle the soul and sink it in an abyss.

Let us bring to all these people our nearness, our understanding, our advice and, above all, our prayer. Let us remind them that God never ceases to extend his hand to everyone, and never abandons his children. He offers new opportunities to everyone, always, even until the last moment of one's life.

Saint Josemaría would sometimes visit the Model prison in Madrid, during the 1930s. Some young people he looked after spiritually were imprisoned there, exclusively for political reasons. Dressed in a cassock, at a time where priests were

often assaulted, he helped them to pray and encouraged them to take advantage of their time, studying languages or reviewing the catechism. He even invited these young people to play soccer with other prisoners who had opposing and even antichristian ideas, so that from a friendship formed while playing sports, a mutual respect could arise.

Saint Josemaría knew that prisons, physical or moral, can also be places for encountering Christ, places for a deep conversion. Therefore he recommended to the faithful of the Prelature that they not shy away from taking up this effort with a Christian sense and with true fraternity. If we Christians take the balm of God's mercy to these places, many captives will experience true liberation: the realization that they are children of God and therefore

loved unconditionally, and protected
also by our Mother Mary.

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