



5th Cenacle of the Heart – 29/07/2022

A Ministry of Mercy from the Spirituality of the Heart

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The topic that summons us to this gathering is that of the ministry, that is to say the mission of the Congregation, which comes from the spirituality of the Heart and which we aim to look at with Saint John Eudes from his XII book titled “The Sacred Heart of Jesus,” which we know is the last part of the great spiritual work of our founding Father called “The Admirable Heart of Mary,” made up of 12 books, which started before 1663 and ended on July 25, 1680. *This same book was published along with the Complete Works in French within volume VIII, the year after the death of its author in 1681¹.*

Today’s objective is to give pointers that will help us perform a reading of our ministry or of our mission from the comprehension of this Mystery of Love which is enclosed in the Heart of Jesus.

In order to treat the ministerial theme, I want to rely on some numerals from Pope Francis’s encyclical *Evangelii Gaudium*, which helps us situate ourselves in the current state of the Church’s ministry.

The plan I am thinking of following in this reflection is the following:

1st Briefly define *What is the ministry of Mercy?* and *What is its core message?*

2nd Describe, with the help of Saint John Eudes, *Who is called to exert this ministry of Mercy?*

3rd With the help of the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, define *To whom is the ministry of Mercy directed?*

4th Establish, with the help of the EG and book XII, some clues that highlight *How do we accompany and exert the ministry of Mercy?*

But before we develop the aforementioned syllabus, I want us to remember the invitation the Saint John Eudes gives us to make use of the gift the celestial Father gives us in the Heart of Jesus:

“What good is this treasure [the burning love of His Divine Heart] if who do not use it? He gave it to us serve ourselves of it, fulfill our obligations and pay our debts” (Chap. XII)¹.

What obligations and debts is Saint John Eudes referring to? Chapter XII tells us that the obligations we have with the Heart of Jesus are “adore it and praise it, love it, give it thanks, satisfaction for our sins, and surrender ourselves to him because we belong to him;” also in this same chapter, it tells us we have three great debts:

- a. The debt of charity towards the neighbor.
- b. The debt of aiding the poor with all our possibilities.
- c. The debt of respect and obedience with our superiors.

Invited this way by our same founding father, we developed this brief reflection making use of the Holy Heart to respond through a ministry of mercy to the debts we have with the intense and eternal love of God for each one of us. We then begin the development of our topic.

1. What is the ministry of mercy from the Spirituality of the Heart?

I’ll begin by bringing here the phrase by Saint John Eudes that made me fall in love with the Eudist spirituality and touched my life in the beginning of my vocational call: “This abyss of my misery attracted the abyss of the mercy of God.”

While going through Saint John Eudes’s life, we can realize that God has touched him with an infinite and eternal mercy that leads him to found the HJM and the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, to establish seminaries, to train priests, to attend to the sick of the plague, to carry out the missions, to worry about the abandoned women of their time, about the poor, about the needy, and to work for the church, even if he was criticized or persecuted.

From the aforementioned, we can establish that the ministry of mercy does not only do acts of charity and give response to the social and ecclesiastical needs of humanity of a certain time, but be moved internally by the experience of the immense and eternal love of God that Saint John Eudes discovered in the Heart of Jesus.

What is the core message of the ministry of mercy?

The core message is the people know, through our charitable humanity, the infinite and eternal love of God that is within the Divine Heart. In Chapter XI, St. John Eudes tells us that “it is the Father who has had a whole project of love, giving us his Son.”²

And in Chapter II, he tells us of the Father the following: “nobody as unloved as you, as outraged and despised of your creatures.”

We can conclude that the main content of the Ministry of Mercy is to make known the Project of love of the Father and the Son that hug in the bonfire of this Heart for

¹ S. John Eudes, Chap. XII from book XII, The Divine Heart of Jesus.

the salvation of the human gender, not with theoretical dissertations, but with charitable actions born from the experience of the same Mercy of God in us.²

2. Who is called to exert this Ministry of Mercy?

Here, with the help of book XII, we can define the following:

a. Whoever has become sensitive to the needs of others by experimenting the liberty that this Divine Heart's love grants us.

St. John Eudes understands that the love of God that is in the Heart of Jesus has liberated us. It tells us, "we have been liberated from sin by the burning love of this holy heart" [...] *"is the immense goodness, the infinite mercy and the incomparable love that has freely liberated us"* (Chap. VIII)².

I delimit the previous words with those of Pope Francis when he tells us: *"any person who lives a profound liberation acquires a major sensitivity to the needs of others."* (EG 9).

b. Whoever experiments that God first gave him love and feels called for others to experience this love.

St. John Eudes invites us to experience the eternal love of Jesus for his Father as own love, a love that fills all things with its immensity and that is in us, in our hearts, in the most intimate part of our intimacy.³ Because of this, with this love from our Savior, we can love his Father, our siblings and the poor, with an eternal, immense and infinite love.³

It is this love that makes us open bold paths towards the pastoral needs and that makes us feel that we are not ourselves, but the Lord, who acts through us in the service and mission we develop.

I bring for this moment the words of Pope Francis, when he tells us: "the real novelty is the one that God Himself mysteriously wants to produce, the one He inspires, the one He provokes, the one He orients and accompanies in thousands of ways. In the whole life of the Church, it must always manifest that the initiative is God's, that "He loved us first" (1 John 4:19) and that "it is God that makes growth" (1 Co 3:7)." (EG 12)

c. Whoever has a memory that is grateful for the saving action of God in his life.

I dare to mention here some of the images from book XII with which St. John Eudes wants us to conserve a grateful memory with the Love of God for us, which is present in the burning Heart of Jesus.

² Op. Cit. Chap. VIII, from book XII.

I start with the two images from chapter VIII, the first, the one with the “raider” who steals from a merchant in the forest and is forgiven by him to the point where the merchant gives him everything he has, even his life, in order to set him free; the second image, the one of the “elephant” que gives itself entirely to the service of a man who has pulled him out of a pit he had fallen into; the third image from chapter XI, the one of the lion, that watching itself slowly coiled and poisoned by a snake is freed by a brave Christian soldier named Godefroy de la Tour, and that loyally follows and protects his liberator; and when he is not allowed to ship the beast with its owner, as he returned from the crusades to his home country, it desperately threw itself into the sea and died in search of its master³.

“What will I give you? What will I do for you who has pulled me out of the dreadful abyss of hell where I fell so many times because of my sins or I would have fallen had I not been preserved from it by the Charity of your most benign Heart? Oh, may the irrationals give me a lesson and teach me the gratitude by your unspeakable mercies!” (Chap. VIII, book XII).

This grateful memory must be present in those who carry out the ministry of mercy. Pope Francis tells us that the evangelizing response of the disciples was motivated by the grateful memory of their Teacher, “The apostles never forgot the moment in which Jesus touched their hearts: “It was around four in the afternoon” (John 1:39)” (EG 13).

3. To whom is the Ministry of Mercy directed?

Here we rely on the reflections of the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* to identify the following groups, that we surely find in our pastoral service:

- a. **The young** that are immersed in a society of the superficial, the immediate, the provisional, the apparent; exposed to the proliferation of fundamentalist religious groups or to a spirituality without God, denying the transcendence; and tending to disorientation and emptiness (EG 62-64).
- b. **The ancient, the sick and the children** threatened by throw-away-culture, exclusion and anonymity (EG 53-57).
- c. **The family** which is the place where we learn to live our differences and to belong to others, goes through a profound cultural crisis, with fragility in its bonds and disenchantment with the church and with their faith in God caused by the influence of the media, by the relativistic subjectivism and by the rampant consumerism (EG 66 y 70). In some families, there is also sexism, alcoholism, domestic violence, fatalistic beliefs mixed with superstition and witchcraft (EG 69).
- d. **The poor** who don't have Access to health, education, communication technologies and, in general, to the wellness culture, and, because they lack

³ Cf. Louis Maimbourg, *Histoire des croisades*, 1676, tomo I, p. 260-271.

opportunities, are breeding grounds for future sources of violence (EG 52 y 59).

- e. **The people anesthetized by the wellness culture**, who create new idols, like money and power, and are called by Pope Francis to exercise selfless solidarity (EG 54-57).
- f. **The people identified with a Christian piety** who prioritize external forms of traditions provided by certain groups, or fascinated by the private revelations that are absolved, developing a Christianity of devotions without social promotion or training for the faithful (EG 70).
- g. **The people of the city** who worry about surviving and need very little to be touched by God's Mercy, missing a contemplative look the discovers God dwelling in their homes, streets and plazas. They experience the absence of a God who lives among the citizens promoting, through them, justice, fraternity and solidarity. Among the inhabitants of the city grows the practice of segregation, violence, drug trafficking, abuse and exploitation of minors, abandonment of the elderly and sick; and there is an increase in various forms of corruption and crime (EG 71 - 75).
- h. **The agents of ministry** (priests and laity) require motivating and healing spaces where they renew their faith, discern their daily concerns with evangelical criteria (EG 77) and where they can overcome the following temptations (identified in EG 78 a 98):
 - Concerned about their *personal spaces*.
 - *Trapped in a spiritual life confused with religious moments*.
 - *Individualists with identity crises and loss of fervor*.
 - *Distrustful and disenchanted with the message of the Church*.
 - *Hiding their identity and Christian conviction*.
 - *Indifferent to the existence of God, the poor and others*.
 - *With a lifestyle that clings to economic safety, power spaces and human glory*.
 - *Attacked by the pastoral siege*, that is to say, a tiredness that is not happy, but tense, heavy, dissatisfied and unaccepted.
 - *Pessimists y disenchanted with vinegar faces*.
 - *Immersed in a continuous desert*.
 - Enslaved by *the spiritual worldliness*. Retracted into themselves and without learning about their sins, closed off to forgiveness, even faced in war with other Christians who get in their way in the search for power, prestige, pleasure or economic safety. They stop living a cordial belonging with the Church in order to feed a spirit of internal wars.

4. How do we exert and accompany a ministry of Mercy?

With the Second Meditation from the Second Series of book XII, we can define three orientations to exert the ministry of Mercy:

- a. **The constant mercy towards those who offend us:** “Forgive from the bottom of your heart and son forget the offenses received from our neighbor.”
- b. **The mercy towards those who suffer corporally, spiritually and morally:** “Sympathize to the miseries of our fellow men and try to alleviate them, consoling those who are suffering.”
- c. **The mercy towards those who don’t want to be helped** or want to remain in sin and mistakes: “Share the spiritual miseries of our brothers, for which we have to take pity on de ungrateful souls that do not have pity for themselves, and use our prayers, good advice and examples.”

And to talk about how to accompany de ministry of Mercy, we are going to head to chapter IX where St. John Eudes talks to us about the eight flames of love that come out of the admirable furnace of the Heart of Jesus; in the first one, he uses four beautiful images that serve us for our final objective in this writing.

Whoever carries out an accompaniment from the ministry of Mercy must be:

- a. **A good shepherd** in the image of the Beautiful Shepherd who guards the sheep, who feeds them, who searches for better pastures for them, who has the most tender care towards them, who protects them from the division caused by the wolves and the dangers of the way. Whoever accompanies the ministry of Mercy must be a good shepherd who grows in prudence, in the capacity for comprehension and in the art of waiting (EG 171).
- b. **A doctor** in the image of the Divine Physician, who is at the bedside of the sick, who has words of healing for them, who exercises in the art of listening (which is more than hearing), who corrects and helps grow, identifying the objective evil of his actions without emitting judgement on their responsibility and culpability (EG 172).
- c. **A father** in the image of the Father of Tenderness, who does not abandon his children immersed in the middle of a society hurt by anonymity , obsessed by the details of the lives of others, immodestly ill from unhealthy curiosity. Father who has a close look to behold, be moved, stop and take off their sandals before each other’s sacred ground (EG 169).
- d. **A son** docile to the Holy Spirit and in the image of the most faithful Son of God, who looks beyond the weaknesses and failures of the people. This way, whoever accompanies the ministry of Mercy, does not focus on moralisms, but instead accompanies the possible stages of growth of the people with patience (EG 44), just as he is unaware of fatalisms or pusillanimity, but always invites to heal, to carry the stretcher, to embrace the cross itself and the announcement of the Gospel (EG 172).

We end our writing this way, remembering what St. John Eudes tells us in chapter II, that “there is no greater love than giving one’s life for the loved one.” Let us ask the father to give each one of us “*that same love*” from the Heart of His Son in order

to love those for whom we are giving up our lives in the ministry and mission that we develop as founders and evangelizers.

Let us also ask God to give us a look at the suffering of the people, in order to have mercy on them. Let us remember here, the words of St. John Eudes about the second cause of the countless wounds of the Heart of Jesus in chapter X: *“when a mother who loves her son watches him suffer, her pain is greater than that of her own son.”* Let us ask the Lord to give us “spiritual vision” to reveal the pain and suffering of the people to whom we can address our ministry of Mercy.

Let us finish our writing with the following prayer:

“Oh God, that by your immense charity, by making us members of your only begotten, wanted us to have a heart with our Head and our Father, grant us, we beg of you, that, lit in the fire of your love and the flames of the charity of the loving Heart of Jesus, we may fulfill your will with a determined heart and, yearning for what is right, deserve to receive what we want.” Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.