

**Holy Mass for the solemnity of the Most Holy Redeemer
(Venice, Basilica of the Most Holy Redeemer – 17 July 2016)**

Homily of the Patriarch, Mons. Francesco Moraglia

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

dear brothers in the priesthood,

gentle civil, military and religious authorities:

I wish you all a joyful festival of the Redeemer, which is the One who brings wisdom to our hearts, so that our lives and the lives of our communities will, truly, be life redeemed by sharing the mercy of the Father, through the Lord Jesus.

Special thanks are given to the pastoral cooperation brought to us by the Capuchin brotherhood of Giudecca for their kind hospitality.

We can not but turn, first of all, the thoughts and prayers to the many victims - children and adults - of yet another terrorist massacre perpetrated Thursday night in Nice. In front of a further and so terrible act of blind violence and killing spree, we feel extremely sad and astonished but, for this, we must not cease to implore for everyone the grace of conversion of hearts and minds, the return of reason and a real sense of humanity.

The dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus, which we just heard, reveals to us the way God relates to us: "*... God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life. ... God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world might be saved through him*" (Jn 3: 16-17).

God's criterion is simple: to love everyone, even those who are not lovable, to welcome everyone as they are: and often that means frightened and hurt.

The gift of God, however, concerns, first of all, eternal life; God leans over each of us in the brief span of our earthly life, marking us out for eternity. Actual and spiritual works of mercy form a whole; they are distinctive and not separate; Jesus is God's answer to the whole person.

It is in the Cross of Christ that we find the logic of God. The mercy of God, in fact, is not a human acquisition; it is manifested in the Crucified One, the One who "wins by succumbing". Yes, the Crucified one by "succumbing wins", even when hit and scarred as happened a few days ago in a church in Venice. Lashing out at the Crucified - the one whom the Christian holds so dear - means defiling the very values that the crucifix - beyond its religious significance - originated in our culture and even today keeps awake in our society: welcoming, forgiveness, reconciliation, mercy.

This is why such sad events – which go beyond the person and the reasons for his actions - must be examined with care and it is appropriate that it should be our entire society to do this, starting from the religious communities, so that we never lack respect and mutual recognition.

If God reasoned like us - that is, with the logic of "give to receive" and, therefore, from the equation of rights and duties - then for us men, there would be only one possibility: condemnation. But God gives everyone a chance to find salvation.

Baptism is, par excellence, the gesture of one who freely reaches out to us. Saving faith is not only a human journey; is a gift that goes before us, lifts us, supports us, accompanies us yet leaves us always free.

At the beginning of everything there was the mercy of God which resulted in the original plans to give his only begotten Son to the world as the firstborn of a multitude of brothers; this is the mercy of the Father. For Christ, in Christ and through Christ, the Father - in unknown ways to us - writes the history of salvation.

The resurrection is not only about what will happen after death, but it is the real fulfilment of our present life; the last word about my life will not come from men but from God. Faith that is not capable of giving a reason for this hope loses the sense not only of what will come after death, but also of our current earthly life.

God's mercy, his leaning towards man, shows us the way in which - in turn - we have to reach out to others. Not surprisingly, in the papal bull which invites us to the Jubilee Year, we are asked to rediscover and live the works of physical and spiritual mercy.

"It will be - writes Pope Francis - a way to awake our consciousness which is so often asleep ... and to enter more and more in the heart of the Gospel, where the poor are the chosen recipients of the divine mercy. The preaching of Jesus presents

us these works of mercy because we can understand whether or not we live as his disciples "(Pope Francis, the extraordinary Jubilee Bull of Indiction *Misericordiae vultus*, 15).

What does it mean, then, to live the Gospel in the face of the urgencies of the modern world, as the phenomenon of migrants and refugees with their stories of pain and death? We also know - and we have learned with horror - that among these desperate people there are also those who are killed because they cannot pay, and, then, their organs are harvested and sold.

The massive flow of migrants both yesterday and today has found politicians unprepared to their responsibilities. From the UN to the European Union and national governments, political responsibilities are widespread and no-one seems able to carry out all the links in the policy, that of day-to-day contact with citizens.

The Pope insists that we cannot close our eyes to this epochal situation; we are called upon both as citizens and believers.

All this calls for a human and Christian vision of things that cannot be left tied up in polemics or in a vague desire to do good; the UN and all (not just some) European states cannot fail to take charge of this situation.

Pope Francis insists that political, economic and financial strategic choices are the result of decisions that come from the heart of human beings who always have need of repentance and of being sensitized to a more supportive sense of justice and mercy, in the certainty that without mercy there can never be true justice, because man is a fragile being. The developed and informed conscience then is the greatest resource of the citizen when we are faced with laws which are not always just.

The risk is to be like the Gospel servant who, relieved of a substantial debt by his master, refuses to forgive a small one to a colleague: *"The servant's master took pity on him, cancelled the debt and let him go. "But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded. His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.' But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt."* (Mt 18, 27-30).

Politicians that are not able to predict and govern at least in part the exodus of millions of people fleeing conditions of "non-life" are perplexing; in any case, no one can pretend that they are not aware of what is happening.

So we must take as our own the motto of Don Lorenzo Milani: "I care!", I am involved, it is close to my heart. In the school of Barbiana "I care!" was the common reference point; it spoke of openness, acceptance, involvement and responsibility. "I care" is not just a verbal challenge; it is an appeal to the conscience, because it is not possible to be a silent witness to an epochal tragedy. The history books will remember the first decades of the twenty-first century as the years of migration or flight by whole populations from impossible living conditions .

The internet, the news agencies, the TV news bring us live updates on the numbers of landings, the dead; they speak of the cemetery in the depths of the Strait of Sicily. But I want to strongly emphasize a point. The issue is "political", of course! But above all our consciences must demand answers worthy of man and of the Gospel. History - as it did for the tragic events of the twentieth century (Communism, Nazism and the two world wars) – must ask what those citizens in a position to dictate the political agenda to others actually knew and could do.

The Christian knows that God, the merciful Father, is the judge of history, and that he keeps in his heart the orphan, the widow, the stranger. With the welcome shown by the Italian people a page of great humanity has been written; here we find all the great Christian and human values of our history.

Thus we must not add to the tragedy, and the tragedy that this situation may find us worn-out. We must never lack a sense of humanity and evangelical piety: "*I was hungry and you gave me food ...*" (Mt 25, 35).

For too long, we have seen, every day, images of rescues and drownings; what we have labelled "journeys of hope" - which are, however, for those who complete them, "journeys of despair" - are the last card in the tragic poker-game in the life of men, women and children from the "second division;" the last card that is played between hostility, cynicism, indifference, sometimes racism, in the hope of finally meeting - says Pope Francis - builders of bridges and not walls.

This second tragedy, that we do not have within us a sense of humanity and Christian piety, is not to be underestimated because it has an effect on the conscience and, when there is only half a conscience remaining, the stakes are always high because the person stops looking. The risk is, unfortunately, that seeing thousands of people die becomes habitual. In the end it becomes "normal" but, in doing so, both the human and Christian within us will be switched off.

We live in the communication age: every day we - and especially our children - metabolize tragic and inhuman images, as if they were part of one of the many television dramas rather than showing the sad reality. These images are then usually preceded and followed by others that advertise luxury goods, so that consumption becomes an end in itself, beauty is seen as an absolute value and an end to be pursued at all costs. But at the same time one does not want to end by trivialising this enormous tragedy.

The message that is passed on, then, is that this is something "inevitable" and, eventually, it becomes "normal." On the one hand, therefore, there is a secure, sheltered, wealthy humanity, ourselves; the other, a humanity at the mercy of climate change - for which entire previously habitable zones are subject to rapid desertification -, of dictatorial regimes, wars, mafia, smugglers and traffickers of organs without scruples; soon the idea grows that we cannot do anything and that all this is inevitable.

To opt out - as I have said - would be a tragedy within a tragedy. The risk is of obscuring our respect for man, human life and the value of compassion. In a way it is killing our humanity; that's why the "I care" cry is so very topical.

This tragedy concerns all of us, our dull consciousness of being citizens of the West which is so confused and bewildered that it seems to have lost its fundamental human values in order to blindly obey a more or less secretive system.

Europe has failed when it has not been able to put people at the centre and on every occasion when it has contributed to cultural, legislative, legal deconstruction, losing its fundamental dimensions, not pursuing the virtuous synthesis between the inner man and consistent cultural choices. Individualism became the focus of everything; of every speech about the conscience, about the person, the family, politics.

The drama of humanity is already present in the Book of Genesis, when Cain replied, "*Am I my brother's keeper?*" (Gen 4.9). The Pope has a powerful voice – and is even applauded - but on the fundamental issues of life, man, human ecology and the economy he remains alone; from time to time, handy expressions of his are quoted, but this is not right. The world leaders - UN, G7, Europe, European Central Bank, International Monetary Fund - seem to pursue another logic.

So there is a culture that struggles to make use of the pronoun "we" and stop saying 'I'. " That's why we must respond "I care!": it is close to my heart, I am

involved. In times of emergency the Gospel asks us not to stop at mere legal-political logic, but to go beyond it and meet the person; to the hungry you must give food, to those who are cold you must give clothes.

Of course, the phenomenon is one of global proportions and we all feel helpless; our conscience, however, remains and that is the space in which all of our humanity can emerge, the place where we can plan a different future. And it is with a renewed awareness that we can come back to hope.

"I care": it is close to my heart, I am involved. Yes, I have humanity – whoever they are - close to my heart, I am interested in them and put them before financial, economic, political balances; balances which certainly cannot be ignored, but we must have the courage to begin with people.

The meaning of today's Gospel is clear and commits us as people and, even more, as believers: *"... God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world might be saved through him"* (Jn 3: 16-17).

We must be, on this feast of the Most Holy Redeemer, individuals and communities capable of mercy; to become, if we cannot be righteous, at least we can be those who have begun to walk towards the righteousness that comes from hearts that are converted or which wish to truly be so.