



PASTORAL MESSAGE FROM BISHOP NOEL SIMARD FOR THE 2021-22 PASTORAL YEAR

MISSIONARY DISCIPLE...TO SPREAD HAPPINESS, I HAVE A GIVING HEART

Always keeping our gaze on the Church in outreach and on our responsibility as missionary disciples within the perspective of the Beatitudes, our pastoral theme this year is focused on the giving heart. And the two beatitudes that serve as a support and pillar are those of pure hearts and mercy.

"*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God*" (Mt 5:8). In everyday language and also in the Bible, the idea of purity has a broad meaning. As the Capuchin Father Raniero Cantalamessa said in a meditation on 15 March 2019, with regard to purity, "*insists on two areas: rectitude of intentions and purity of morals. Purity of intention is opposed to hypocrisy, and purity of morals is opposed to sexual abuse*". Many Christians only remember the purity of sexuality and forget the purity of intentions. And it is on the latter that we will focus our attention. In fact, the pure heart is the heart that is free of all hypocrisy and is filled with a real and concrete love for God and for others. It is the heart that gives without seeking glory or self-interest. It is the heart of a person who does not act or put on a mask but seeks authenticity and truth. It is the heart that refuses to hide behind so-called good deeds or to live in falsity and appearances that too often hide a double life. The pure heart lives in transparency and refuses to lie to God and to others. As the prophet Samuel reminds us, "Men look at the appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Sam 16:7). What counts, therefore, is the uprightness and rectitude of intention rather than the action taken". When you give alms, do not sound the trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, for the glory that comes from men" (Mt 6:2). This is also what Jesus invites us to do when he gives the example of the widow's contribution (Mk 12:41-44).

One of the conditions for achieving this authenticity in giving and action is to opt for simplicity of life. When the heart is preoccupied with collecting only for oneself or for the future, it becomes insensitive to the other who lives in need or in indigence. This simplicity consists of being content with the essential and basing one's life on what is unique and unadulterated. Hence the need to sort out our lives, which are often cluttered with trivial things, and the importance of setting priorities. Simplicity is more about having a giving heart rather than being closed in on our possessions. In a word, the beatitude of the pure in heart has as its primary purpose to free us from that which prevents us from recognizing the features of God's face in the features of human beings, and especially in those who experience distress, forgetfulness, marginalization or rejection. The beatitude of purity of heart reminds us that the Lord requires a gift of self that comes from the heart. Jesus lived this purity of heart throughout his life by showing mercy to those who were wounded in life and sick in body and heart.

As Pope Francis reminds us in his *Exhortation Gaudete et Exsultate - the call to holiness in today's world*, "*mercy has two aspects: it consists in giving, in helping, in serving others, and also in forgiving, in understanding*" (n.80). And he writes: "*To give and forgive is to try to reproduce in our lives a small reflection of the perfection of God who gives and forgives in superabundance*" (n. 81). With regard to mercy as a gift, Jesus left us a key parable for understanding this mercy as benevolent compassion, that of the Good Samaritan. Jesus is the Good Samaritan who sees our misery, who sees with his heart full of kindness and love. He is the Good Samaritan who comes close to us, who comes to meet us like the Samaritan on a journey who stops to take care of the wounded person lying half dead. Jesus is the Good Samaritan who is taken in by our wounds, our bruises, and our physical and inner distress. He reaches out to us to bring us healing. Indeed, Jesus' compassion is active benevolence. He does not just show sensitivity to misery, he does not just say that it affects him and that he suffers from it: he remedies it. He acts by healing broken bodies and hearts.

Following Jesus, we are invited to be Good Samaritans filled with merciful compassion for all those who call for help, who lack love, who seek shelter, who are rejected as strangers, who are voiceless, powerless, and have nothing. Following the example of Christ, I am this Good Samaritan when I can't see misery without putting it in my heart, when I come to the aid of the other without measuring my time and without calculating the cost. I am this Good Samaritan when I make myself close to the other, especially the weak, the destitute, the poor. I am this Good Samaritan when I dare to cross the barriers of indifference, selfishness, injustice and prejudice in order to welcome all people and serve them with love. I am the Good Samaritan when I abandon my complacency and security to reach out to the wounded of life to bind up their wounds.

To create happiness this year, I have a giving heart. To this end, I make those values inspired by the Gospel my own, and little promoted by our society, namely fragility, gratuitousness, simplicity, humility, mercy and charity. I know how to recognize the treasures of goodness and compassion experienced and expressed by so many people during the pandemic and I thank God for all those who give of themselves without counting the cost, and often in silence and with no fanfare. I challenge the appearance of happiness in the accumulation of goods or wealth for its own sake, and I attest to the only true wealth which is that of love and the gift of self, a gift of a God who, in Jesus, gives himself and us to love. I draw from the source of the gift that is God: that of His word, that of His life, that of His love, and that of His heart.

Let us be missionary disciples by being close to those who cry out in distress and misery, by living the gift of self that comes from the heart, by loving God and our neighbour with the measure of God that is immeasurable. Let us remember that when we create happiness by giving, by giving ourselves, by giving our lives, we ourselves find happiness, for there is "more happiness in giving than in receiving" (Acts 20:35). May the Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph guide us along this path of the heart that gives out of love and with love!

+ *Neil Armard*

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