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## General audience: mercy is a way of life

Vatican City, 30 June 2016 – Mercy is not an abstract word, but rather a way of life: one decides to be merciful or not and, to paraphrase the words of the Apostle James, it may be said that mercy without works is dead, as what renders it living is its constant dynamism, its reaching out to the needy, to the aid of those who are spiritually and materially disadvantaged. "Mercy has eyes to see, ears to listen, and hands to console".

Again, mercy and this time its active implementation were the theme of the Pope's catechesis during the jubilee audience in St. Peter's Square, attended by around fifteen thousand people. Francis noted that, since in daily life we are aware of the needs of the poor and needy, we are called to respond to this condition of suffering. "At times we pass before situations of dramatic poverty and it seems as if it does not touch us; everything continues as if nothing were wrong, in an indifference that in the end makes us hypocrites and, without our awareness, leads to a form of spiritual lethargy that makes the heart insensitive and life sterile. People who pass by, who go ahead in life without taking account of the needs of others, without noticing the many spiritual and material needs, are people who pass without living; they are people who are not useful to others. Remember: those who do not live to serve, are not useful in life".

Those who have experienced God's mercy in their own life cannot remain indifferent to the needs of their brothers and sisters. "Jesus' teaching does not provide any means of escape: I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was in prison and you came to me. You cannot delay when faced with a person who is hungry: you must give something to eat. Jesus tells us this. The works of mercy are not theoretical ideas, but consist instead of concrete witness. We need to roll up our sleeves to alleviate suffering", observed Francis.

As a result of the changes in today's globalised world, some forms of material and spiritual poverty have multiplied and, he explained, we must therefore be creative in finding charitable solutions and identifying new working methods, so that the way of mercy can become increasingly concrete. "We are therefore required to remain alert as sentinels, so that, faced with the poverty resulting from the culture of well-being, the Christian outlook does not become weak and unable to focus on the essential".

This "focusing on the essential" means "focusing on Jesus, looking at Jesus in the hungry, the imprisoned, the sick, the naked, in those without work who must maintain a family. Look upon Jesus in these brothers and

sisters of ours; look upon Jesus in those who are lonely, sad, in those who have made mistakes and are in need of consolation, in those who need to walk the path with Him in silence in order to feel they are not alone. These are the works that Jesus asks of us. Look upon Jesus in them, in these people. Why? Because Jesus looks upon me, he looks upon all of us".

The Holy Father went on to describe to the faithful his recent trip to Armenia, the first nation to embrace Christianity at the beginning of the fourth century, and which throughout history has borne witness in martyrdom. Francis thanked the president of the Armenian Republic, the Catholicos Karekin, the Patriarch, the Catholic bishops and all the Armenian people for welcoming him as a "pilgrim of brotherhood and peace".

He also mentioned that in the coming months he will visit Georgia and Azerbaijan, another two countries of the Caucasus, and remarked that he had accepted the invitation to visit them for two reasons: "On the one hand, to emphasise the value of the ancient Christian roots present in these lands, always with a spirit of dialogue, and with other religions and cultures, and on the other, to encourage hope and paths of peace. History teaches us that the path of peace requires great tenacity and continual steps, starting with the smallest ones and gradually enabling them to grow, moving one towards the other. Precisely for this reason it is my hope that each and every one will be able to make their own contribution for peace and reconciliation. As Christians we are called to strengthen fraternal communion between us, to bear witness to the Gospel of Christ and to be the leaven of a more just and harmonious society. Therefore, all the visit was shared with the Supreme Patriarch of the Armenian Apostolic Church, who welcomed me fraternally for three days in his home".

Francis concluded by evoking once more his embrace of the bishops, priests, men and women religious, and all faithful of Armenia. "May the Virgin Mary help them remain steadfast in faith, open to encounter and generous in the works of mercy".

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