

“Be merciful as your Father in heaven is merciful” (Matthews 5; Luke 6)

He who reflects well and used the warm reason of intellect clearly will understand that the first and foremost foundation of the Christian religion is mercy, clemency, and compassion because our human and divine perfection both consist of them. By the, we conform to the likeness of God. Therefore, he who examines the evangelical text and the concepts expressed by our compassionate Redeemer and contained in the Christian law closely, in truth finds that this very law of mercy and perfection does not claim anything but perfect love and mutual delight and support among mortals, though such a delight is extended to God first.

This mercy and its practice among Christians must be this way so that every one of our spiritual possessions as well as material goods should be shared among all the faithful, as we read in the Acts of the Apostles in chapter 2, where we find that “all those who believed lived together and had everything in common; they sold their possessions and goods and distributed all the proceeds among themselves according to what each one needed.” And in the chapter 4: “None of their members was ever in want.” In fact, the holy Apostle Barnabas sold his own possessions and brought the proceeds to the feet of the Apostles to be distributed among the needy. As a result, he obtained from God such a gift of grace that he was called to the status of Apostle. Consequently, such a custom was observed by other Apostles, who, invited by Christ to follow Him, after having left behind and distributed in works of mercy their earthly possessions, began their spiritual life that led them to an incorruptible and eternal life. Therefore, we conclude that the root and foundation and perfection of our Christian religion is but a bond of perfect brotherly mercy and love. He who is endowed with it can truly call himself Christian because, as St. Ambrose maintains, “all the knowledge of the Christian religion consists in mercy and compassion.”

To such a mercy, when it is explained with enthusiasm and spread in abundance, we have to attribute numerous sound fruits, mainly three, which are bestowed by God.

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Illumined by such a consideration, enkindled by divine grace, and inflamed by perfect love, the magnificent and generous Sir Jerome Miani, Venetian nobleman, wanted to institute a rule and a way of living and doing good not as much for his own salvation but as a common manifestation and example for everyone in this earthly pilgrim life. This rule was instituted first for himself and then for those who wanted to imitate him. No doubt in persevering in it with divine grace one can be sure of his final salvation. The reason is, as we have said at the beginning of our speech, that the principle and foundation of the Christian religion consists in renouncing and giving up earthly, fragile, and fleeting riches and powers, and converting them to the common use for the poor beggars and needy, according to Jesus Christ’s teaching, “If you want to be perfect, go and sell everything you have and give to the poor, then come and follow me.” Wishing to obey and follow this sound advice, he got rid of every fear of future poverty and need; with joyful heart and obedient will he distributed not a small quantity of earthly goods and riches for the common support of the needy, as he knew well their wants and needs.

He also considered it insignificant to have shared such riches, which are not really ours. In fact, they are not given to us but they are only lent to us by God under the power of unstable fortune. Believing that he did not give away his own things but that he was only God’s delivery man, after this distribution he dedicated all of himself, entire bodily strength and the power of his soul, to the honor, aid, instruction, teaching, custody, defense, and material and spiritual support of

any miserable, sick, afflicted, abominable, and unfortunate person, either man or woman, above all if they were widows and orphans. Great admiration aroused in the faithful who look at such a profuse and immense charity, so much mercy and compassion: to wash disgusting wounds with his own hands, to cleanse sores, to heal with healthy remedies and bandages, to tolerate stench and other filth that cause nausea and sickness both in nurses and supervisors, while not only not abhorring them, but touching them with his own hands as if they were fragrant with sweet odor. What unheard-of equanimity! What immense compassion! What virtues a man so generous and sweet expresses in our days for our benefit! Truly happy are and will be those who, despising the fleeting worldly delights, follow his footsteps and examples. We can truly believe that God sees and governs through his Providence every human creature in this happy age of ours. Therefore, He wanted to put him on display for today's mortals, who are led astray from the sanctity of the Christian religion and live enraged and alienated from any form of meekness and compassion, so that through him they may be recalled to the right, honest, compassionate, Catholic and Christian religion. In fact, we can already see the clear example of some public prostitutes, who, having left behind their dishonest, infamous, and lusting life, are now led to sound penance. And many others of both sexes, once enveloped in carnal delights and passions, after many attempts, much care, mercy, and exhortations, he has guided to be more generous and charitable, and to give up dishonest and vicious conversations.

Now, this beneficial beginning needs to grow and bear fruits so that Sir Jerome may provide universal health to his followers and growth and perseverance to his children and disciple. He needs the means to feed these miserable people, orphans, and widows. For the sake of charity he begs the Christian faithful to let themselves be moved by piety and compassion for so many poor, sick, and troubled, who are already so numerous under his care (and many others are going to join in), and to help them mercifully with generous donations, according to their ability and abundant means.

Moreover, he makes each person aware that the alms donated by the faithful and devout will not be wasted or diverted to any other cause but will be only used for the support of these troubled people. In order that Sir Jerome may more easily help such miserable people, it was ordered that three men tailored for this task be appointed in every neighborhood of our town to raise the necessary alms and to deliver them according to the needs.

Almost as a religious act, all those appointed to such a task of charity will meet at least once a week to discuss what is useful or necessary for the support of these children, orphans, widows, and other miserable people who are under the care and education of Sir Jerome. He does not want any other care of those troubled people but the procuring of physical health if they are sick, with his own hands, and the serving, educating, and bringing them to the fear of God, as well as to a just, honest, religious living and talking. By leaving the task of collecting alms to those appointed, he will work to establish this Company as a devout religion so that God be praised, our town and fatherland be edified, and the givers of alms receive merit and eternal reward. In order to acquire the latter, to those who give alms the Bishop will also grant, besides what has been said above, for each donation, deed, counsel or favor, forty days of indulgence.

Some gentlewomen of good reputation, honesty, prudence, and good morals have been appointed to handle the administration and management of those who have left their dishonest lives and have turned to true penance. Such gentlewomen are to teach a just, honest, and moral living. They will receive the care and management of all the other sick, orphans, and miserable girls who entered or will enter into such a Congregation. In order that this benefit be useful to everybody, not only to the people of our town, but to all our fatherland, it is ordered that in all

the lands of our Diocese some devout persons will be appointed, who are going to provide the alms to feed those in poverty. They must also determine if such poverty-stricken people live in the lands, towns, or villages where they are appointed: the sick, the exhausted, children, widows, and others who do not have the means for living because of great poverty, or do not have support. They should notify the Congregation of them. In turn, the Congregation will welcome them, feed them, and assist them together with the other poor. It has also been ordered that the alms given by devout people will not be accumulated for buying properties or real estates, but that, day by day, they will be distributed for the benefit of the poor. In this way, they are going to live in poverty so that from day to day they will not know what kind of food they will have the following day. In this way, the saying of the Lord Jesus Christ, who said to his disciples: "Do not worry about what you are going to eat and drink; in fact, your Father in heaven knows what you need" will be fulfilled.

In God we have to put all our hope and trust because He feeds even the birds of the sky. Therefore, those who desire to reach the heavenly fatherland, where all goods are owned, every reasonable hunger is satisfied, must resolve to perform such works of mercy with every effort and vigilant care. They are also to be sure without any doubts that superabundant gifts of heavenly grace will come to them, through which they will reach the desired harbor of salvation.