

MISSIONARIES OF CHARITY - CONTEMPLATIVE

**" To do ordinary things with
extraordinary love for the
greater glory of God "**



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L S F (Laudetur Sacra Familia)

*"There is nothing now but the joy of conviction
that the Contemplative Brothers will be
a fruitful branch on the Tree of Life – Jesus."
(Mother Teresa M.C.)*

Jesus, our Divine Master, wants the Contemplative Branch of the Missionaries of Charity to love and serve Him in the distressing disguise of the poorest of the poor in joyful praise, thanksgiving, intercession and reparation (R. 100). This is done mainly through prayer, penance and works of mercy both spiritual and corporal; thus to satiate the infinite thirst of Jesus on the Cross for love of souls. Since it is never the will of our Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost (cf. Mt 18, 14), Jesus wants us to go in search of the lost sheep *calling them to repentance*. He wants us *to instruct the ignorant while counselling the doubtful*. There are so many *sorrow-filled people to be comforted*. Amazingly enough *to bear wrongs patiently and to forgive injuries* are spiritual works of mercy; as is *praying for the living and the dead*.

In the evening of life when we appear before God we will be judged according to the works of mercy: *"Come, blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, you gave Me to eat, I was thirsty, you gave Me to drink, I was a stranger, you welcomed Me, I was naked and you clothed Me, I was ill and you comforted Me, in prison and you came to visit Me. Then the just will ask: Lord, when did we see You hungry, thirsty, homeless, naked etc...I assure you, as often as you did it for one of my least brothers, you did it to Me."* (Mt 25, 31-46) Whenever, therefore, we feed the hungry, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, take care of the sick, visit the prisoners, *we do it to Jesus*. The Jesus whom we contemplate, love and adore in *the Bread of life*, with respect, faith and devotion is the same Jesus whom we are called to meet, love and serve with the self-same respect, faith and devotion, in the distressing disguise of the poorest of the poor. *"How could it be otherwise, since the Christ encountered in contemplation is the same who lives and suffers in the poor?."* (Vita Consecrata 82) Our Constitution also says: *"From the presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament we go to the presence of Jesus in the poorest of the poor and vice versa."* (R. 5)

Our God then is not a silent spectator nor a disinterested listener; He knows everything about us. He takes into consideration all that we do. *"God would not be so unjust as to forget all you have done, the love you have for His name or the services you have done, and are still doing, for the holy people of God. Our desire is that every one of you should go on showing the same enthusiasm till the ultimate fulfilment of your hope, never growing careless, but taking as your model those who by their faith and perseverance are heirs of the promises."* (Heb 6, 9; 12)

Jesus was a man of prayer and of great penance and sacrifice. He prayed and fasted for forty days in the desert: *"During that time he ate nothing"* (Lk 4, 1 ff.); *"Jesus went onto the mountain to pray; and He*

spent the whole night in prayer to God" (Lk 6, 12); *"In the morning long before dawn, Jesus got up and left the house and went off to a lonely place where He was absorbed in prayer."* (Mk 1, 35) Before performing any miracles Jesus prayed to the Father: *"Then Jesus lifted up His eyes and said: 'Father, I thank you for hearing my prayer. I myself knew that you hear me always'..."* (Jn 11, 41-42); *"Jesus took with Him Peter, John and James and went up to the mountain to pray..."* (Lk 9, 28 ff.) Jesus not only prayed before His Passion but even asked His apostles to stay awake with Him: *"... 'Simon are you asleep? Had you not the strength to stay awake one hour?' Jesus threw Himself on the ground and prayed..."* (Mk 14, 32 ff.) Jesus also prayed for His enemies before giving up His life on the Cross: *'Father, forgive them, they do not know what they are doing.'* (Lk 23, 33) His death on the Cross was a great act of prayer: *"'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit'. With these words Jesus breathed His last."* (Lk 23, 46)

Jesus' whole life was a continuous prayer filled with sacrifice and penance. Long fasts, vigils for entire nights, filled with cries and tears: *"During His life on earth, he offered up prayer and entreaty, with loud cries and with tears... Son though He was, He learned obedience through His sufferings; when he had been perfected, He became for all who obey Him the source of eternal salvation..."* (Heb 5, 7-10)

Jesus has not only set a remarkable example of prayer and sacrifice but invites all His followers to take up their crosses every day: *"If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross everyday and follow Me."* (Lk 9, 23) He also wants us to pray continually - day and night - and never lose heart. *"Will not God see justice done to His elect if they keep calling to Him day and night...?"* (cf. Lk 18, 1-8)

We also see the apostles follow the example of the Master. Soon after the Ascension of Jesus, the apostles *"with one heart joined constantly in prayer, together with some women, including Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and with His brothers."* (Acts 1, 14)

Jesus not only left the Church a great patrimony of prayer and penance, but, even more, He also gave us a rich heritage of works of mercy: *"Jesus took pity on them and healed their sick"* (Mt 14, 14); *"Jesus called His disciples to Him and said 'My heart is moved with pity for the crowd. By now they have been with Me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not wish to send them away hungry, for fear they may collapse on the way' "* (Mt 15, 32); When Jesus saw the widow of Naim, *"He felt sorry for her and said to her: 'Don't cry' and then He went up and touched the bier"* (Lk 7, 14 ff.); *"Jesus, tired by the journey, sat down by the well and asked the Samaritan woman for a drink."* (Jn 4, 6 ff.) We can easily say that Jesus' life on earth was an interrupted work of prayer, penance and mercy.

Our holy Catholic and apostolic Church then, is built on prayer, penance and works of mercy: all of them contribute to her basic structure. If prayer is the life breath of the Church, sacrifice and penance are the skeleton, and works of mercy the flesh. Therefore, there must be a harmonious balance between these basic elements.

In the first place, Jesus wants us to be men of prayer, and this is also the mind of the Church, as we read in Canon 663/1: *"Contemplation of divine things and assiduous union with God in prayer is to be the first and foremost duty of all religious."* He also wants us to share the overflow of our experience of God with others, especially with the poor: *"Give freely what you have freely received. The measure you measure*

with will be measured back to you. “ (Lk 6, 38) We are called to proclaim “*that which we have heard, which we have seen with our own eyes, which we have watched and touched with our own hands...*” (1 Jn 1-4)

At times people ask us: aren't you Contemplatives, then how can you have homes for homeless people of the street or for homeless handicapped boys, etc.? These questions and comments are quite legitimate and appropriate as we are the Contemplative expression of the Missionaries of Charity founded by Mother Teresa of Calcutta. We, too, like St. Benedict have a programme of “*ora et labora*”. But our “*labora*” time is spent with the poor. “*The Gospel is made effective through charity, which is the Church's glory and the sign of her faithfulness to the Lord. This is demonstrated by the whole history of the consecrated life, which can be considered a living exegesis of Jesus' words: 'As you did it to the one of the last of these my brethren, you did it to me' (Mt. 25, 40). Many institutes, especially in modern times, were established precisely to address one or other of the needs of the poor. But even when such a purpose was not the determining factor, concern and care for the needy – expressed in prayer, assistance and hospitality – was always a normal part of every form of the consecrated life, even of the contemplative life. And how could it be otherwise, since the Christ encountered in contemplation is the same who lives and suffers in the poor? In this sense, the history of the consecrated life is rich with marvellous and sometimes ingenious examples. Saint Paulinus of Nola, after distributing his belongings to the poor in order to consecrate his life fully to God, built the cells of his monastery above a hospice for the poor. He rejoiced at the thought of this singular 'exchange of gifts': the poor, whom he helped, strengthened with their prayers the very 'foundations' of his house, wholly dedicated to the praise of God. Saint Vincent de Paul, for his part, loved to say that, when one is obliged to leave prayer to attend to a poor person in need, that prayer is not really interrupted, because 'one leaves God to serve God'. ” (Vita Consecrata 82) “You have such a beautiful opportunity to take care of Jesus in the poor and be real contemplatives” (Mother Teresa).*

The word “*contemplative*” then, need not only be explained and understood in a purely traditional sense, but it can also be explained, understood and lived in a different way. There can be new approaches to the whole concept of “*contemplation*,” and a new way of living one's contemplative vocation. We can also be walking contemplatives; contemplatives on the road. As prayer is a necessary means for continual contact with God, so any and every authentic love-filled activity of man can also be a means of union with God. There can be pure mental contemplation and there can also be active contemplation; even more, there can be real contemplation in action. A genuine contemplative is also a true missionary. This can be seen in St. Thérèse of Lisieux who has been proclaimed the patroness of the missions together with St. Francis Xavier. The former was a contemplative missionary, while the latter a missionary contemplative. The modality or the way and manner of contemplating can be different, but the essential elements are the same. Contemplatives must not only know the techniques of contemplation, but must have the ability to use any material for contemplation, even so-called “*profane*” or “*worldly*” realities. In this context we can learn again from St. Thérèse, who writes: “*I accept all distractions for the love of God, even the wildest fancies that cross my mind.*” This is the acid test of a true contemplative. With humility and serene confidence, a contemplative Brother tries to transform the profane into sacred. He not only purifies it, but then even perfumes it with the virtues of faith, hope and charity: the result is a profound and deepening sense of peace and joy, which is part of an ongoing process that ends with the Beatific Vision.

Jesus wants us to bear witness in every situation that we belong to Him. The religious habit that we wear *”is a sign of consecration, poverty and membership.”* (Vita Consecrata 25) We are Jesus’ soldiers who have been called to fight constantly against our spiritual enemies: the world, the devil and the flesh. It is the work of soldiers to protect and safeguard their country even with their lives. How much more then must we religious remain loyal to Jesus, the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, even to the point of shedding our blood!

In conclusion we can say, together with St. Peter Chrysologus, that *“There are three things by which faith stands firm, devotion remains constant, and virtue endures. They are prayer, penance and works of mercy. Prayer knocks at the door, penance obtains and works of mercy receive... These three are one and they give light to each other.*

Penance is the soul of prayer, works of mercy are the life-blood of penance. Let no one try to separate them... If you pray, fast; if you fast, show mercy; if you want your petition to be heard, hear the petition of others. If you do not close your ear to others, you open God’s ear to yourself.

When you fast, see the fasting of others. If you want God to know that you are hungry, know that another is hungry. If you hope for mercy, show mercy. If you look for kindness, show kindness. If you want to receive, give. If you ask for yourself what you deny to others, your asking is a mockery...

Let prayer, penance and works of mercy be one single plea to God on our behalf, one speech in our defence, a threefold united prayer in our favour.” (cf. St. Peter Chrysologus’ Sermon 43. Office of Readings for Tuesday, Lent, week 3)

Mary, Mother of all religious, the bride without spot or wrinkle, by imitating you, may we preserve with virginal purity an integral faith, a firm hope and a sincere charity: sustain us, the Missionaries of Charity Contemplative on our pilgrimage towards the sole and eternal Blessedness.

To you, Virgin of Contemplation, who treasured the mysteries of our salvation in your heart, pondering them over, do we address our prayer that you teach us to treasure the Word of God in our heart and ponder over the events of our daily life.

To you, Virgin of the Visitation, do we entrust ourselves and our Society that we may go forth to meet human needs, to bring help, and above all to bring Jesus to the poorest of the poor. Teach us to proclaim the mighty things which the Lord accomplishes in the world, that all people may extol the greatness of the Lord. Support us in our work with and for the poor, the hungry, those without hope, the little ones, and all who seek your Son with a sincere heart.

To you, our Mother, we address our constant prayer. Mary, you desire the spiritual and apostolic renewal of your children as they respond in love and complete dedication to Jesus, your beloved Son. You did the will of the Father, ever ready in obedience, courageous in poverty and receptive in fruitful virginity; obtain from your divine Son the graces we need to remain faithful to our vocation and to serve the Lord joyfully through prayer, penance and works of mercy until the day we die.

We ask you this so that in everyone and in everything glory, adoration and love may be given to the Most High, the Lord of all who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Love and prayers. God bless you.

Fr. Sebastian Vazhakala M.C.