

Missionaries of Mercy:
Promoters of the New Evangelization
by encountering the youth and celebrating reconciliation

Catechetical approaches for a spirituality of mercy

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Introduction ***“Miserando atque eligendo” – chosen by mercy***

When now Pope Francis was elected to the episcopal ministry, he chose a motto related to *Jesus’ call of Matthew* as found in chapter nine of the gospel by the same saint. Jesus looks at Matthew, who is considered a public sinner, with eyes *full of mercy*. It is the way that Jesus looks at him, that opens the heart of Matthew and leads it to conversion. The famous theologian and saint, Beda *the Venerable*, in a homily that is still part of the Liturgy of the Hours of September 21st., the feast day of Saint Matthew, coined the expression *“miserando atque eligendo”* to express the way Jesus looked at Matthew with such mercy and love, and then chose him as a disciple.

Jorge Mario Bergoglio chose this same sentence to remind himself and the church, what is the core of the good news, and when he was elevated to the Petrine office, he brought his chosen episcopal motto with him to give even more importance to it in his papal ministry. After the extra ordinary Year of Mercy of 2015-2016, Pope Francis institutionalized the ministry of the Missionaries of Mercy allowing them to continue as such, and this has become a great blessing for the universal church. Already in two occasions, the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization has invited the Missionaries of Mercy from all continents to the Vatican to listen to their experiences and testimonies. The main purpose of these

meetings, that will take place hopefully every two years, is to provide a space for mutual fraternity, support, and dialogue as each Missionary of Mercy shares his experience.

Thus far, Pope Francis' episcopal motto about mercy is mirrored in the focus of his proclamations and announcements. His homilies, his apostolic documents, the topic of synods, the experience of bishops during their *ad limina* visits and his whole personal attitude and outreach has to be understood as his effort to make us even more aware of God's divine mercy. This fundamental emphasis on mercy and the outline of Pope Francis' papacy can be found in his first Apostolic Exhortation, '*EVANGELII GAUDIUM*', currently regarded as the '*Magna Carta*' of the pastoral care of the church and the core of evangelization.

Even before Pope Francis placed his pastoral focus so strongly on the spirituality and the practice of mercy, his predecessors had already highlighted the importance of mercy in proclaiming the gospel. Saint John Paul II not only implemented Divine Mercy Sunday for the whole church but also gave us, in his Encyclical of November 30, 1980, '*DIVES IN MISERICORDIA*', a very profound reflection on mercy, as found in the Old and New Testament. Guided by these sources of divine revelation, chapter thirteen stressed the main call and ministry of the church in these words: "*The Church lives an authentic life when she professes and proclaims mercy-the most stupendous attribute of the Creator and of the Redeemer-and when she brings people close to the sources of the Savior's mercy, of which she is the trustee and dispenser. Of great significance in this area is constant meditation on the Word of God, and above all conscious and mature participation in the Eucharist and in the sacrament of Penance or Reconciliation. The Eucharist brings us ever nearer to that love which is more powerful than death: "For as often as we eat this bread and drink this cup," we proclaim not only the death of the Redeemer but also His resurrection, "until he comes" in glory. The same Eucharistic rite, celebrated in memory of Him who in His messianic mission revealed the Father to us by means of His words and His cross, attests to the inexhaustible love by virtue of which He desires always to be united with us and present in our midst, coming to meet every human heart. It is the sacrament of Penance or Reconciliation that prepares the way for each individual, even those weighed down with*

great faults. In this sacrament, each person can experience mercy in a unique way, that is, the love which is more powerful than sin. This has already been spoken of in the encyclical Redemptor hominis; but it will be fitting to return once more to this fundamental theme.” (DM, 13).

In the same line but with images that contain a certain mystagogical power, Pope Benedict XVI has reflected on the importance of mercy as the fundamental realization of love. In the sense of Saint Vincent Paul who once has said that: *“being merciful is the small (and daily) coin of love”*, Pope Benedict entitled his first encyclical *“Deus caritas est”*. Following the First Letter of John in the New Testament the Holy Father emphasizes, *“‘God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him’ (Jn 4, 16). These words from the First Letter of John express with remarkable clarity the heart of the Christian faith: the Christian image of God and the resulting image of mankind and its destiny. In the same verse, Saint John also offers a kind summary of the Christian life: “We have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us” (DCE, 1).*

Mercy therefore is the heart of our faith and gives expression to the gospel where we realize we have been created because of God’s love. Pope Benedict wrote about this understanding of mercy in his famous book about Jesus of Nazareth. There he examined the Hebrew context of the origin of the word ‘*mercy*’ and found that *mercy* has the same meaning as ‘a mother’s womb’ and as ‘a mother’s lap’. To bear life and to give it birth, in this sense means to have and to demonstrate mercy towards someone else. As the heartbeat of a mother and of the child in her womb are interdependent, in the same manner living mercy, harmonizes the human person with God. Because we are created in the image of God, our filiation with God establishes a certain relationship that opens our own heart towards the needs of others. In this beautiful and mystagogical image, Pope Benedict understands and interprets the call and sending of the Church as evangelizing the world within a mentality of mercy. In *“Deus caritas est”* he concludes: *“The entire activity of the Church is an expression of a love that seeks the integral good of man: it seeks his evangelization through Word and Sacrament, an undertaking that is often heroic in the way it is acted out in history; and it seeks to promote men in the various arenas of life and human activity. Love is therefore the service that the Church car-*

ries out in order to attend constantly to man`s sufferings and his needs, including material needs. And this is the aspect, the service of charity” (DCE, 19).

Within the same framework of mercy, Pope Francis took up the results of the episcopal synod, initiated by Pope Benedict XVI, on *the New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith* that took place in October of 2012. In this Synod, the fathers placed great attention to the gift of mercy as the precondition of evangelization in all its forms and as the foundation for transmitting the faith through a personal witness of life. We might add that Pope Francis’ meditations on the results of the Synod presented in *“Evangelii gaudium”* in November of 2013 are not distant from those written in 1975 by Saint Pope Paul VI in *“Evangelii nuntiandi”*. These documents are therefore the foundational guidelines as we reflect on mercy and the ways through which young people are reached and come to express it through different initiatives and programs.

I *Evangelii gaudium* as the ‘*Magna Carta*’ of Mercy

In his Apostolic Exhortation *“Evangelii gaudium”* Pope Francis has adopted the image of mercy as ‘a mother’s womb’. Already in the first chapter of this document, he conceives the church as *“a mother with an open heart”* (EG, 46). He develops an understanding of mercy as mission, and of *mission* as living mercy. Mercy from this perspective conceives the church as a church with *open doors*. In paragraph 46 of this Encyclical the Holy Father says, *“A Church that `goes forth´ is a Church whose doors are open. Going out to others in order to reach the fringes of humanity does not mean rushing out aimlessly into the world. Often it is better simply to slow down, to put aside our eagerness in order to see and listen to others, to stop rushing from one thing to another and to remain with someone who has faltered along the way”* (EG, 46).

This view of mercy contains the courage of being weak and willing to be hurt for the sake of others, just as a mother is willing to bear labor pains in order to give life to her child. This horizon of mercy is expanded in paragraph 49 where it says: *“Let us go forth, then, let us go forth to offer eve-*

ryone the life of Jesus Christ. Here I repeat for the entire Church what I have often said to the priests and laity of Buenos Aires: I prefer a Church, which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security” (EG, 49).

“*Evangelii gaudium*” presents the overall focus of evangelization and teaches us to be aware mercy and its need to be communicated and transmitted to all areas of life and faith. Evangelization through mercy includes the ability of forming a real community. It is focused on a *kerygmatic* catechesis, which means that the first announcement of the Gospel is based on the testimony of a personal life that provokes or elicits questions in others. As “*Evangelii nuntiandi*” alludes to, an encounter with a gesture or with deeds of mercy in daily life can raise the question as to the *why* of that person’s behaviors or motivations. The response possibly given is the witness of the word and opens a dialogue for a further proclamation of the gospel. This kind of so-called *kerygmatic* catechesis is always an exemplification of mercy.

The general call to be evangelizers through mercy has to be shaped by and expressed through the charism of each person and of each generation. When Pope Benedict XVI came to Cologne in 2005 for the World Youth Day, he said this famous sentence: “*The church is young and she is alive!*” A missionary church has to focus on the youth. The present generation represents the future of our faith in a particular way. Pope Francis’ post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation ‘*Christus vivit*’ continued this focus on young people and called on them to be witnesses of faith in our modern world.

II The 2018 Episcopal Synod on Youth as orientation for a merciful mission

The way young people give witness through mercy always has an ecclesial dimension and is related to the Church and its state of always been ‘new’ or ‘young’. In his Apostolic Exhortation “*Christus vivit*” Pope Francis highlights this important link when he states: “*Youth is more than a simply pe-*

riod of time; it is a state of mind. That is why an institution as ancient as the Church can experience renewal and a return to youth at different points in her age-old history. Indeed, at the most dramatic moments of her history, she feels called to return with all her heart to her first love. Recalling this truth, the Second Vatican Council noted that, 'enriched by a long and living history, and advancing towards human perfection in time and the ultimate destinies of history and life, the Church is the real youth of the world'. In her, it is always possible to encounter Christ 'the companion and friend of youth'" (CV, 34).

Every open-minded attitude of young people that is nourished by their relation with Jesus Christ is a fresh expression of faith. "*Christus vivit*" combines the gift of being young with the charism of being missionary. The document points out that young people, in all areas of their being and engagement, have a chance to be authentic, faithful and supportive of others, (cf. CV, 253 ff.). This Exhortation reflects on the new ways of communication among young people and on the opportunities and boundaries presented by the new digital age. It also proposes to them the steps to take for an active vocational discernment in life (cf. CV, 278 ff.). In so far the witness of mercy in the lives of young people is concerned, this writing includes a critical reflection on what is beneficial and useful for them and calls young people to be of service to others in order to build a deeper and stronger community of faith and love.

Regarding this call, this Exhortation focuses on the increasing individualism of modern culture and its challenges and limits. The paragraph about the digital world and its environment reflects the pulse of our time and the life of young people when it says, "*The digital environment is characteristic of the contemporary world. Broad swathes of humanity are immersed in it in an ordinary and continuous manner. It is no longer merely a question of 'using' instruments of communication, but of living in a highly digitalized culture that has had a profound impact on ideas of time and space, on our self-understanding, our understanding of others and the world, and our ability to communicate, learn, be informed and enter into relationship with others. An approach to reality that privileges images over listening and reading has influenced the way people learn and the development of their critical sense*" (CV, 86).

Because the World Wide Web and social networks have created new ways of communication, it is important to use them responsibly by becoming aware of their inherent limitations and dangers. *“Christus vivit”* emphasizes these limitations and their possible deficiencies when it says: *“It is not healthy to confuse communication with mere virtual contact. Indeed, the digital environment is also one of loneliness, manipulation, exploitation and violence. (...) Digital media can expose people to the risk of addiction, isolation and gradual loss of contact with concrete reality, blocking the development of authentic interpersonal relationships”* (CV, 88). To stand up against these dangers and temptations in a courageous way is a way of bringing mercy to today’s contemporary culture and its means of communication. Where young people dare to do thus, the difference becomes a very authentic proof of the Gospel.

Another way to illustrate how mercy has been lived in a secularized world is by looking at the biographies of young saints. These young saints gave witness through their words and deeds, some even to the point of death. In *“Christus vivit”*, Pope Francis lists several examples of young saints. He states, *“The heart of the church is full of young saints who devoted their lives to Christ, many of them to dying a martyr’s death”* and continues, *“they were precious reflections of the young Christ; their radiant witness encourages us and awakens us from our lethargy”* (CV, 49). He summarizes it in this way, *“The Synod pointed out that many young saints have allowed the features of youth to shine forth in all their beauty, and in their day they have been real prophets of change. Their example shows what the young are capable of, when they open themselves up to encounter Christ”* (CV, 49).”

Besides this Apostolic Exhortation and its impact on the call to young people to live mercy, I would like to examine the forthcoming New General Directory for Catechesis.

III The New General Directory for Catechesis as a source for education in mercy

The expected new *General Directory for Catechesis*, (to be published hopefully by the midst of this year) has the commission to strengthen evangelization and catechesis and focuses on how these can make God's divine mercy obvious and present in our world. Already in its first chapter, the New Directory describes the process of evangelization as one that has to bring people into touch with the Trinitarian revelation of God. A catechesis that helps develop such an experience should be a catechesis performed under the paradigm of mercy. Paragraphs 41 and 42 of the Directory address this explicitly and speak about the missionary model of a church that *goes forth* and that will be present in the *outskirts*. Such a church requires the practice of mercy and an authentic catechesis, a catechesis in action, a strong witness for believers and non-believers. It also requires the unity of orthodoxy and orthopraxy. Consequently, the language of mercy has to go beyond words. It needs to be made explicit in gestures and deeds that become the proof of its vital content (cf. GDC/2019, 41).

All the corporal and spiritual works of mercy that unfold the love of Jesus promote evangelization and help catechize their recipients in the nucleus of the gospel. The vocation of the catechist requires their openness and attentiveness to all the new and ongoing needs of those they minister to and of their longing for support (cf. GDC/2019, 42).

The new document underlines the framework of a concrete experience of mercy and the indispensable way of dialogue in all forms of catechesis and evangelization. It also examines the catechetical process to be used with different age and target groups. The *Directory* is sensitive to the use language in the effort to reach and catechize young people. In this regard, paragraphs 235 and 236 emphasize the context of culture, communication and community. They mention the whole area of social media as a preferred platform young people use to get to know and to be in contact with each other. Themes from the previously quoted passages of the apostolic document "*Christus vivit*" can be found in this section of the GDC/2019 that highlight the witness of mercy given by the youth. This witness takes

place under the conditions of a modern and rapidly changing culture. Since young people have a profound desire to communicate, the church must propose or create occasions and initiatives where young people are offered this possibility.

IV Initiatives in youth ministry for the awareness of mercy

Among all the international initiatives in youth ministry during the past three decades, the World Youth Days, initiated by Saint John Paul II, have been the most successful and sustainable ones. These international meetings usually combine spiritual, liturgical and social events. The preceding days of preparation in each nation and the international encounters are favorable occasions to appreciate how mercy is understood and lived by young people. The personal witness of those participating motives many other young people to follow Christ.

We can ascertain the degree of mercy evoked in young people during the World Youth Days by seeing their engagement with the Blessed Sacrament. Their interest in a spirituality of contemplation and communal Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament combined many times with social activities involving words and deeds of mercy is one of the fruits of these worldwide events. Contemplation as a source of interaction with others offers a new perspective on the witness of Catholics in a secularized world. Words and deeds of mercy, which are always more than social work, are an expression of the love of Christ who only has our hands to help others, to carry their burdens, and to work for peace and unity.

Where the church is enriched in a new way by this spirit of contemplation in adoration the vision of the gospel of mercy becomes the mission embraced by particular parishes. A Church that *goes forth* has to discover this perspective. Currently one of the greatest challenges for the local church is to acquire a vision that leads to mission. Many initiatives adopted very often show more of a self-centered focus than an outwardly one. Today it is necessary to learn new ways of going forth. This will entail listening and responding in love; an attitude of mercy that is expressed in the words: *only who feels what he or she sees will give what they can.*

Mercy – as said before – is always a matter of dialogue. Responding to social and economic challenges therefore is a kind of mercy that also reflects personal and social responsibility. With his Encyclical Letter “*Laudato si*” of 2016, Pope Francis has awakened this sensibility and has aptly fomented attention to all questions related to caring for God’s creation and the environment. Young people have recently shown a great interest in and engagement with efforts that care for nature and protect the environment. Their “Fridays for future” have become a worldwide phenomenon that is, obviously for them, also a witness of mercy.

The faith and identity of Catholics is shaped when they are moved by mercy. To *know* about our faith is obviously a precondition for *doing* our faith. During these past years, young people have also participated in the process of developing the YOUCAT and the DOCAT (a catechism on the Social doctrine of the Catholic Church). This collaboration is a loud and clear witness of identification with the Church and its teaching. Some of our young people around the world have also declared to Pope Francis their commitment to the study and practice of the DOCAT, giving a further witness to the social dimension and expression of mercy and of their faith.

In 2015-2016, Pope Francis proposed to the Church the Extraordinary Year of Mercy. This initiative fomented the awareness that mercy is not just a feeling but more so a reality of solidarity. The Missionaries of Mercy that were born during the Year of Mercy have been able to minister in parishes, convents, shrines, and retreat centers all over the world and the spiritual fruits they have been able to bring to the church have prompted further projects at the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization. I would like to share with you some of these projects and ideas.

V The Missionaries of Mercy and the importance for Reconciliation

Although evangelization and the transmission of faith sometimes seems to be difficult, there are great signs of hope. The millennial generation isn’t a projection of the interests of the 68-generation. The large gatherings or international meetings in the universal church like the World Youth Days, the annual Taizé-meetings, the “Nights of Light”- initiatives in several dio-

ceses, the MEHR-conference in Germany (Augsburg), the “Night Fever”-event, the Catholic Underground and Encounters Nights found in the United States and Canada and other initiatives demonstrate a renewed attention for the Sacrament of Reconciliation and the practice of confession. In many young people, the experience of weakness causes a deep desire for healing. The experience of living in broken families because of divorced parents, or difficulties in finding a job often followed by a lack of self-esteem, sometimes can move them to search for a deeper meaning in life.

When Pope Francis instituted the Missionaries of Mercy with their specific calling and ministry in the church five years ago, we – at the PCPNE – were not sufficiently aware at that time, how fruitful this idea would become for the entire church. As you know, since their inception, we invite all Missionaries of Mercy throughout the world to come to Rome in a biannual rhythm to share their experiences especially around their ministry of reconciliation. Having received the commission by the Petrine See to absolve those sins whose absolution is reserved to the Holy Father by canon law, the work of the Missionaries of Mercy has brought greater pastoral attention for the importance of the Sacrament of Penance becoming a blessing for the entire local and worldwide Church.

Mercy is our message to the world because in politics and in society, in the world of culture and even in the world of trade and business, in our communal and in our individual life, everyone is longing for peace and justice, forgiveness and healing. With this in mind, we can affirm that Missionaries of Mercy engaged in the process of reconciliation should have faces that mirror how the Lord sees us, how the Lord recognizes us, and the Lord loves and touches us. Allow me to use a painting to make even more explicit what a pastoral ministry of mercy means for us engaged in this service of reconciliation. I invite you to enter into the scene of the vocation of Levi, the future Saint Matthew, as it has been expressed in the famous painting of Caravaggio, found in the Roman church of San Luigi di Francesi. (You will find a copy on your seat.)

In this picture, we see Jesus is entering a room together with Saint Peter. Just as the Church will introduce the gospel of mercy that is incarnated in Jesus Christ to everyone, so the persons depicted in the picture represent

different types and sorts of people and behavior. It is not obvious who is meant by the gesture of vocation given by Jesus: is it *the one who is wondering if he is meant* or is it *the other who is focused on his business counting money*. It is not clear also if the scene takes place indoors or outdoors. Vocation and reconciliation are gifts of the Lord that will touch inwardly the person in order to send them in mission to the outskirts. Caravaggio's painting therefore reflects this double dimension. He uses a style called "*chiascuro*" that combines light and shadow to express a whole range of experiences and even moods. Analogically, where people accept the mercy of the Lord they move into the light and where people are not yet touched by mercy because of their own egoism they remain in the shadows, in darkness.

Every celebration of reconciliation in confession is a threshold of "*chiascuro*". To be called and to be led into the light of mercy and reconciliation depends on how much the Missionary of Mercy is aware of this and of the currents of light and darkness in his own life and spirituality. The more he is cognizant of these realities, the more compassion he will be able to feel and to give to those who approach him either in confession or for other reasons. To be welcoming and to be aware of the necessary distinction and distance between the penitent and the priest is a precondition for mirroring what the painting of Caravaggio wants to express. To be attentive in listening, to get between the lines of what is *not* said and to respect at the same time what the penitent *cannot* say are all virtues Missionaries of Mercy should possess. The Missionary of Mercy becomes a henchman, a page, of the grace of God when he is able to motive others into a deeper relationship with God by giving witness of how Christ is present in his own life. Missionaries of Mercy should be approachable, amicable, good-humored, welcoming and should absolutely respect the privacy of the penitent and of all those who come to him for whatever reason.

Our experiences with the Missionaries of Mercy at the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization have also made us aware that shrines have become primary places for a pastoral ministry of reconciliation and mercy and therefore ideal places for Missionaries of Mercy.

We continue to learn from your observations and to initiate further projects based on them. I conclude by sharing with you some of the special initiatives promoted by the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization so that you can have a comprehensive view of the Apostolate of Mercy entrusted to this Dicastery.

VI Special Initiatives of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization

The fruits of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy can also be ascertained by the institutionalized events that will take place every year until further notice. These moments have assumed a special importance to the universal Church and to the local churches that celebrate them:

- **Sunday of the Word of the Lord**

Last year (30. 09. 2019) Pope Francis made the decision, to proclaim the Third Sunday of Ordinary Time, the *'Sunday of the Word of God'*. In his Apostolic Letter *'APERUIT ILLIS'* establishing said Sunday, he reminds us that *"To listen to Sacred Scripture and then to practice mercy: this is the great challenge before us in life. God's word has the power to open our eyes and to enable us to renounce a stifling and barren individualism and instead to embark on a new path of sharing and solidarity"* (AI, 13). This initiative can be something all Missionaries of Mercy can embrace.

- **24 Hours for the Lord**

Since the Year of Mercy, the initiative of *"24 Hours for the Lord"* has been associated with the Fourth Sunday of Lent and has become a powerful invitation to celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation. Each year the Holy Father leads a communal celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation with individual confessions, where he himself publicly goes to confession with one of the priests assisting. Confessions are heard within an evening of prayer with Exposition and Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. That many dioceses and parishes have adopted this

initiative or similar like it demonstrate the great impact this event has had and continues to have everywhere. *Twenty-Four Hours for the Lord* has promoted a greater awareness for the Sacrament of Reconciliation and has become a safe place where those who had been alienated from the sacrament for a long time have discovered forgiveness and mercy anew.

- **World Day of the Poor.**

The World Day of the Poor has its roots in the *Sunday with the Poor* celebrated during the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy. The spirituality of mercy found a concrete expression in a liturgy that included the poor serving in the various liturgical ministries of the holy Eucharist as active participants (*actuosa participatio*) and in the common meal with the Holy Father that followed it. Pope Francis, himself, sitting at the table in midst of the poor became a sign to the world of *mercy in action*. The public media picked up this image and diffused it widely to such an extent that now many dioceses are celebrating similar events. Out of this first powerful experience, the *World Day for the Poor* has become an annual event. In his recent message, “*The hope of the poor will not perish for ever*” (Ps, 9, 19) for the Third World Day of the Poor in 2019, Pope Francis underlined the connection of hope, mercy, faith and love. There we read, “*Before all else, the poor need God and his love, made visible by “the saints next door”, people who by the simplicity of their lives express clearly the power of Christian love. God uses any number of ways and countless means to reach people’s hearts. Certainly, the poor come to us also because we give them food, but what they really need is more than our offer of a warm meal or a sandwich. The poor need our hands, to be lifted up; our hearts, to feel anew the warmth of affection; our presence, to overcome loneliness. In a word, they need love.*” (n. 8). Where the image of mercy becomes reality the proclamation of the gospel is understood immediately.

- **Via pulchritudinis – icons and crèches**

In this year our Pontifical Council is planning to hold an international congress on the importance of the *via pulchritudinis*. We want to highlight what Pope Francis already has said in *“Evangelii gaudium”* paragraph 167: *“Proclaiming Christ means showing that to believe in and to follow him is not only something right and true, but also something beautiful, capable of filling life with new splendor and profound joy, even in the midst of difficulties. Every expression of true beauty can thus be acknowledged as a path leading to an encounter with the Lord Jesus. That has nothing to do with fostering an aesthetic relativism which could downplay the inseparable bond between truth, goodness and beauty, but rather a renewed esteem for beauty as a means of touching the human heart and enabling the truth and goodness of the Risen Christ to radiate within it.”* The way of beauty is particularly suitable for the poor who seem to be distant from the beautiful expressions of life. Our faith and our liturgies contain multiple expressions of beauty that can open up new horizons of meaning and consolation in the lives of the poor and indeed in every person who allows themselves to be captivated by it. Our Pontifical Council hopes to lead many to an understanding of and an experience of mercy lived directly through images and through participation with what is beautiful; for this reason, it has sponsored initiatives like a concert for the poor, an exhibition of nativity scenes, and hopes to sponsor in this coming year a congress on icons.

Conclusion

Mercy in general and in particular is the exemplification of what the gospel proclaims and proposes for all of us to live. Where mercy touches the hearts of young people and where it leads people to healing in a process of reconciliation, where it moves them to give witness, evangelization is taking place. Catechetical approaches for a spirituality and a pastoral ministry of mercy therefore needs both: an ongoing spirituality that identifies the specific needs of people and practical gestures and deeds of love exemplified with images that reach the mind and heart. We can actually

summarize our whole ministry in the expression found in the First Letter of John: *“God is love and who remains in love remains in God and God in him”* (1 Joh 4,16b).