



ORDO FRANCISCANUS SAECULARIS

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Circ. n. 13/14-20
Prot. n. 2851/14-20

Rome, March 20, 2016
Palm Sunday of the Lord's passion

Christ is risen, indeed!

Dear Sisters and Brothers!

May the good Lord give you his peace!

I send my most fraternal greetings to all of you, with one of the most ancient greetings of the Christians: Let us rejoice, because Christ is risen! The merciful Heavenly Father did not allow death to overcome life. The first Christians in the 1st century have already used the greeting: *Christ is risen*, and answered, *he is risen, indeed!* This is the centre of our faith, what the ancient Christians knew that has to be confessed repeatedly and shared with everyone. How beautiful it is to have this greeting as a daily bread! Light cannot be hidden, joy has to be shared!

We are messengers of the resurrection. We have to give testimony of Christ *who died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures; ... he was buried; ... he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures* (cf. 1Cor 15.3-4.). It belongs to our secular Franciscan vocation and mission to be apostles of this good news.

Salvation has come from the cross, the death and resurrection of Christ has renewed the world. We are living in a renewed world, also if sometimes we would like to see more evidence of it. This renewed world is where we have to live, work, fulfil our vocation and mission.

Christ's redemptive work, while essentially concerned with the salvation of men, includes also the renewal of the whole temporal order. Hence the mission of the Church is not only to bring the message and grace of Christ to men but also to penetrate and perfect the temporal order with the spirit of the Gospel. In fulfilling this mission of the Church, the Christian laity exercise their apostolate both in the Church and in the world, in both the spiritual and the temporal orders. These orders, although distinct, are so connected in the singular plan of God that He Himself intends to raise up the whole world again in Christ and to make it a new creation, initially on earth and completely on the last day. In both orders the layman, being simultaneously a believer and a citizen, should be continuously led by the same Christian conscience. (Vatican II, AA. 5.)

We have already been called for more than forty years to fulfil this mission. It is time to look into ourselves, and start it again. We can always renew our lives, and thus continue to be collaborators in the renewing work of God, but Easter is a privileged moment, when we celebrate and rejoice over the never-ending love of God, and experience in what a way this love can renew the world, and join our love and our efforts to that of God.

Be merciful, just as (also) your Father is merciful. (Lk.6.36.)

This Easter is a special one for us, for this year is a special year. Celebrating is always special, but sinking in the mercy of God and giving thanks to Him throughout a whole year is something more particular. God grants us His mercy and invites us to be merciful like him. In this letter I'd like to invite you to fill our joy of Easter with the decision to be more committed to be witnesses of the resurrection, delivering the love of the merciful Heavenly Father.

All along this year of mercy, our life has to be characterized by this being merciful. And what else could better build our fraternities than this divine mercy?

Mercy is the first characteristic of God. This is the name of God. (P. Francis - Andrea Tornielli: The name of God is mercy, 2015.) We do believe, that our Order is guided by the Holy Spirit, whom Saint Francis confessed to be the real Minister General of the Order, and by whom the Father delivers his eternal love. And I do believe that nothing can build a true fraternity better than the mercy of God that invites us to be merciful.

Always, but particularly this year we have to remember this, and act and live accordingly. For what happens, if we follow the corporal and spiritual works of mercy is, that our fraternities will become more alive, we will have a better understanding of the difficulties and misery of those many around us and will be more compassionate, and thus we will deliver the love and mercy of God to the world. What is this if not our apostolic mission that comes from our vocation?

In this spirit, I invite you this Easter to study and live the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, particularly in our fraternities, but also whenever and wherever we are working in the world.

I know the testimony of those many sisters and brothers, who **feed the hungry** and **give drink to the thirsty** in many ways: in soup-kitchens, by collecting food, by inviting those in need to their homes and to the fraternities. What a blessing is to be instruments of the Lord, *when your heavenly Father feeds them. (Mt. 6.26.)* This kind of solidarity and compassion has to characterize or fraternal life inside the Order, too. We have to be attentive to the needs of our sisters and brothers, both in our proper local fraternities, and also on the international level. The differences among the national fraternities, who involve our brothers and sisters, are great, and as sisters and brothers, we always have to work on this worldwide work of solidarity and fraternity.

Many, too many all over the world, lack the human dignity and the social security that should be marked by having the essential material goods. Having a place to stay at home, a shelter to hide and a home for the family is what each human being deserves. Our intention to **clothe the naked and shelter the homeless** is a part of how to **build a more fraternal and evangelical world so that the kingdom of God may be brought about more effectively. (Rule 14.)**

We also have to take care of those who do not have the freedom to move, as those who are home-bound for various reasons, or are in hospitals or in prisons. The sick, the elderly are our close sisters and brothers. **Visiting the sick and the imprisoned** is a privilege to express how God loves us: it is Him who takes the first step, and regardless our abilities, it is him who is approaching. It is him who loves us first, and a true love is his, that does not expect any compensation. Also, this is a privileged moment to experience what does freedom mean for God: the freedom of spirit, the freedom of the soul, the freedom to love.

Burying the dead does not only mean to provide nice funerals, but to rediscover the dignity of human life. We shall accompany those who are facing to enter the house of the Father, and this fraternal accompaniment is extremely enriching for all. It is a privileged moment to help someone to be ready to enter the last gate, and to see that this life on earth is only a short, first part of the

eternal life. Christ is risen, indeed!

All this is an important part of our presence in the world and of our work for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation.

In addition, I would like to call your attention to the fact, how much the spiritual works of mercy can build our fraternities. And when I speak about fraternities, first of all – but not exclusively – I mean the local fraternities, because this is the first and foremost place where we live our vocation.

The spiritual works of mercy are acts of fraternal love and compassion, breaking down the walls, building unity, and getting each other closer to God. *Where there is mercy and discretion, there (is) neither superfluity nor hardness. (Adm. XXVII.)*

We have to find the great treasure that God has granted to us in these acts.

We have to strengthen our formation, in terms of human, Christian and Franciscan formation. This should also include to *counsel the doubtful* and to *instruct the ignorant*. We are responsible for each other, we are walking hand in hand on our vocational journey.

Sins are poisoning the fraternities, should they be either unveiled or obvious. We are often afraid to warn each other, we are often too shy, but we have to *admonish sinners* as a fraternal act, trying to redirect them onto the right way, in a very loving and fraternal spirit. Admonition is never a condemnation or an adjudication, but a loving approach to re-establish the injured fraternal bonds. It can be a first step to reconciliation, helping one another to recognize our sins and to reconcile with oneself, with God, and with the neighbour. Reconciliation encompasses the completeness of love. The same way, many times our sisters and brothers, of even ourselves, feel a loss, feel being offended, hurt. We build our fraternity when we *comfort the afflicted*, and also when we *bear wrongs patiently*. Being patient comes and reforms the peace of heart, that comes from the Holy Spirit, the comforter. With these acts we bring spirit to the fraternity, and with this spirit can each of us *forgive offences*.

Finally, when we *pray for the living and the dead*, we remember, that our fraternities are always growing. Do not forget, that the visible number of the members of the fraternity is not the reality. We have many, many sisters and brothers, holy ones, who are interceding for us, and who are true members of our fraternity.

With these acts we will be instruments of the divine mercy, and will please God and each other.

The year of mercy is a great treasure, a big opportunity for all of us to grow in faith and love.

There is one more important point, like a short summary or conclusion of all I wrote to you above. When we recall the motto of this year, let us continue reading the Gospel of Luke.

Stop judging and you will not be judged. Stop condemning and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven. Give and gifts will be given to you; a good measure, packed together, shaken down, and overflowing, will be poured into your lap. For the measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you. (Lk. 6.37-38.)

Stop judging and condemning, forgive and give gifts. Three short points, that are essential for our fraternal life. Three steps in the spiritual life, three bricks or stones to be laid one over the other. The first is the condition of the second, and the second is the condition of the third. We have to begin with stopping judging and condemning, so will we be able to forgive, and once we forgive, we will be able to give gifts to our neighbours. Remember, a good measure, overflowing, will be poured into your laps!

The mercy of God is never an encouragement to continue a bad practice, but a torchlight pointing out the new way to set on. Let us set out to the deep, right now! Let us let God renew us and our fraternities!

May Christ, the risen Lord be our joy and help. Each and every one of you are in my thoughts and in my prayers. I send you my most personal, fraternal greetings.

Your brother and minister

Tibor Kauser
Ministro Generale OFS

