

Maastricht, 4 November 2016

Dear Sisters in Belgium, Brazil, East Indonesia, Indonesia, Kenya, The Netherlands, Norway, The Philippines, Tanzania, Timor Leste, The USA and Vietnam.

As we celebrate today the feast of St Charles Borromeo, let me invite you to call to mind again the significance of this day in relation to bearing the name of St Charles Borromeo, the Patron Saint of our congregation and the challenges posted on us. Together with this, let us also put side by side this Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy declared by our Holy Father, Pope Francis.

Each one of us is called to listen once again to Jesus' central message: WHAT MATTERS MOST IS MERCY! "*Jesus Christ is the face of the Father's mercy - his words, actions and person reveal the mercy of God.*" (Misericordiae Vultus, 1). God, persistently and repeatedly, reaches out to all persons who are too busy and too preoccupied by sinful inclinations and desires. Despite our refusal and stubbornness, it is God's "*delight to show mercy*" (Micah 7:18) for "*the Lord is full of compassion and mercy*" (James 5:11).

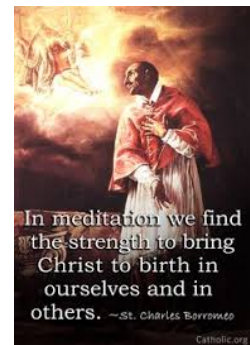
Both the Old and the New Testament recount many stories of God's people going astray and, time and again, God's mercy prevails. An example is David – a young and brave man chosen by God to become King of Israel - yet, he rebelled and committed sin. He took the wife of Uriah as his own and sent him to battle against the Ammonites where he was killed. Although David deserved God's wrath and punishment, God was merciful to him and forgave him. (cf. 2Samuel 12: 10-13)

Among his disciples, Peter was one of the closest to Jesus. However, Peter betrayed Jesus by denying three times that he knew him. Even so, Jesus never gave up on him – "*miserando atque eligendo*" – Jesus showed mercy to Peter by choosing him despite his shortcomings. He fully trusted Peter and told him to take care of his people: "*Feed my sheep.*" (John 21:17) Jesus continues to manifest himself in our world today through each one of us.

In our present context, how, then, do we regard mercy? How do we practice mercy on a day-to-day basis? Mercy is not simply having pity on someone in need or being reconciled with someone who has wronged us. Rather, mercy extends to all of our life situations, daily experiences and relationships with others. I invite you to reflect on the theme of Mercy in each of these aspects which impacts significantly on our life as religious.

Spirituality and Prayer Life

Our spiritual life is a journey into the heart of God, where we receive his infinite graces and tender mercy. St. Charles Borromeo urges us to “*stay quiet with God*” so that the “*tiny spark of God’s love already burning within us may not get blown out*” but will become brighter and stronger. And for this to happen, we must keep sacred everyday moments of prayer, silence and contemplation.



The fast pace of our world with its many fascinating distractions makes it more and more difficult for us to slow down, be still and “*keep ourselves in the presence of God*”. When we deepen our intimacy with God, we become filled with his divine grace; a grace that we should share joyfully to others as a gift for “*the more we give, the more we receive.*”

How is your soul? What makes it happy? Does it look forward joyfully into the presence of God to contemplate His love and to savor His mercy? Our capacity to care and to heal depends greatly upon how much we have been touched and healed, loved and forgiven by God Himself.

Let the intensity of our spiritual life shine forth in our capacity to love and to heal. Only then can we aspire to transform our lives and those of others.

Apostolate

God's mercy is a call to mission. Pope Francis reminds us that *"to ignore the poor is to despise God."* He challenges us to get out of our routinely comfortable apostolate and bring God's message to people directly - where they live, where they work, where they struggle.

In 1576, a great famine beset Milan, followed by a plague. City officials and noble men fled the city; yet, St. Charles Borromeo, bishop of Milan, chose to stay and organized persons and religious communities to attend to those who were afflicted and to minister to the dying. His efforts to feed 60,000-70,000 people daily made him use up his own funds and, when that was not enough, he took out a loan so that he could continue to provide food. His generous mercy and brave administration of the sacraments to those in need of attention, are what made him so much loved by the poor.



Let us be as generous to each one of us. We must offer that same generous mercy to those living in the peripheries of society.

Our Lord Jesus himself reminds us that mercy without action is useless. How then are we translating our prayers of mercy for others into concrete acts of charity? Who are the people we have particularly touched or continue reaching out at this point of time?

Community Life

God's mercy always seeks reconciliation and renewal. Living together as sisters in community is a blessing that should be appreciated by each one. Mutual acceptance of the dignity of each person and the gracious sharing of one's giftedness is the path to genuine communion and restoration.



However, our human weakness leads us to fail many times in showing mercy to our companions. We cannot easily let go of the temptation to succumb to gossip and criticism. We feel jealous and envious of the goodness of others. There are occasions when we are hostile and frustrated with those we live due to recurrent

failures but we are encouraged to be patient, to give a chance for the person to repent and be hopeful that people can change for the better.

What is the quality of my contribution to community life? Is my presence and attitude generally enhancing and inspiring? Has the community becoming more and more a genuine home where acceptance, forgiveness, respect, and consideration are practiced?

How good it would be if our communities become spaces where pardon and merciful love overflow, rather than fault-finding and condemnation. For our God is “*a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.*” (Psalm 86:15).

Leadership

All of us are sinners; no one is exempted from this. This awareness of being a sinner should render us humble, and more so, if we have been chosen for a leadership position within the Congregation. It is because of God’s mercy that one has been given the grace of office hence feelings of superiority and power should be banished from our hearts. The greatest is the one who serves. (cf. Luke 22:26)

Exercising power should be used as a means to help others grow into their God-given strengths and abilities thus empowering them for greater responsibility. Leaders must do their best to lead by their good example for words are meaningless if not put into practice. St. Charles Borromeo aptly put it this way: “*Be sure that you first preach by the way you live. If you do not, people will notice that you say one thing, but live otherwise, and your words will bring only cynical laughter and a derisive shake of the head.*”

How do I behave before the people I am called to serve? Do I resemble the kindness, generosity and humility of Jesus? Do I consider it a privilege to be of service to others rather than seeking to be served?

May God's mercy to us remind us of our duty to be a merciful presence to those who have entrusted themselves to our authority and care. *"Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful."* (Luke 6:36).

My dear Sisters, let us do our best to begin every day of our life with new eagerness, with a new spirit of understanding and compassion for all. In this Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, may you experience God's transforming mercy and proclaim that same mercy to all you encounter!

HAPPY FEAST DAY!