APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION

DILEXI TE

OF THE HOLY FATHER LEO XIV

TO ALL CHRISTIANS

ON LOVE FOR THE POOR

[**Multimedia**]

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1. “I HAVE LOVED YOU” (*Rev* 3:9). The Lord speaks these words to a Christian community that, unlike some others, had no influence or resources, and was treated instead with violence and contempt: “You have but little power… I will make them come and bow down before your feet” (*Rev* 3:8-9). This text reminds us of the words of the canticle of Mary: “He has cast down the mighty from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty” (*Lk* 1:52-53).

2. This declaration of love, taken from the Book of Revelation, reflects the inexhaustible mystery that Pope Francis reflected upon in the Encyclical *Dilexit Nos* on the human and divine love of the heart of Jesus Christ. There we saw how Jesus identified himself “with the lowest ranks of society” and how, with his love poured out to the end, he confirms the

dignity of every human being, especially when “they are weak, scorned, or suffering.” [1] As we contemplate Christ’s love, “we too are inspired to be more attentive to the sufferings and needs of others, and confirmed in our efforts to share in his work of liberation as instruments for the spread of his love.” [2]

3. For this reason, in continuity with the Encyclical *Dilexit Nos*, Pope Francis was preparing in the last months of his life an Apostolic Exhortation on the Church’s care for the poor, to which he gave the title *Dilexi Te*, as if Christ speaks those words to each of them, saying: “You have but little power,” yet “I have loved you” (*Rev* 3:9). I am happy to make this document my own — adding some reflections — and to issue it at the beginning of my own pontificate, since I share the desire of my beloved predecessor that all Christians come to appreciate the close connection between Christ’s love and his summons to care for the poor. I too consider it essential to insist on this path to holiness, for “in this call to recognize him in the poor and the suffering, we see revealed the very heart of Christ, his deepest feelings and choices, which every saint seeks to imitate.” [3]

CHAPTER ONE
A FEW ESSENTIAL WORDS

4. Jesus’ disciples criticized the woman who poured costly perfumed oil on his head. They said: “Why this waste? For this ointment could have been sold for a large sum, and the money given to the poor.” However, the Lord said to them in response: “You always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me” (*Mt* 26:8-9,11). That woman saw in Jesus the lowly and suffering Messiah on whom she could pour out all her love. What comfort that anointing must have brought to the very head that within a few days would be pierced by thorns! It was a small gesture, of course, but those who suffer know how great even a small gesture of affection can be, and how much relief it can bring. Jesus understood this and told the disciples that the memory of her gesture would endure: “Wherever this good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her” (*Mt* 26:13). The simplicity of that woman’s gesture speaks volumes. No sign of affection, even the smallest, will ever be forgotten, especially if it is shown to those who are suffering, lonely or in need, as was the Lord at that time.

5. Love for the Lord, then, is one with love for the poor. The same Jesus who tells us, “The poor you will always have with you” (*Mt* 26:11), also promises the disciples: “I am with you always” (*Mt* 28:20). We likewise think of his saying: “Just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me” (*Mt* 25:40). This is not a matter of mere

human kindness but a revelation: contact with those who are lowly and powerless is a fundamental way of encountering the Lord of history. In the poor, he continues to speak to us.

Saint Francis

6. Pope Francis, explaining his choice of that name, related how, after his election, a Cardinal friend of his embraced him, kissed him and told him: "Do not forget the poor!" [4] It is the same appeal that the leaders of the Church made to Saint Paul when he went up to Jerusalem to confirm his mission (cf. *Gal* 2:1-10). Years later, the Apostle could still reaffirm that this was "actually what I was eager to do" (*Gal* 2:10). Care for the poor was also a great concern of Saint Francis of Assisi: in the person of a leper, Christ himself embraced Francis and changed his life. Even today, Saint Francis, as the Poor Man of Assisi, continues to inspire us by his outstanding example.

7. Eight centuries ago, Saint Francis prompted an evangelical renewal in the Christians and society of his time. Wealthy and self-confident, the young Francis was taken aback and converted by his direct contact with the poor and outcast of society. The story of his life continues to appeal to the minds and hearts of believers, and many non-believers as well. It "changed history." [5] A further step on the same path was taken by the Second Vatican Council, as Saint Paul VI pointed out when he said that "the ancient parable of the Samaritan served as the model for the Council's spirituality." [6] I am convinced that the preferential choice for the poor is a source of extraordinary renewal both for the Church and for society, if we can only set ourselves free of our self-centeredness and open our ears to their cry.

The cry of the poor

8. The passage of Sacred Scripture in which God reveals himself to Moses in the burning bush can serve as a constant starting-point for this effort. There he says: "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them... So come, I will send you" (*Ex* 3:7-8,10). [7] God thus shows his concern for the needs of the poor: "When the Israelites cried out to the Lord, he raised up for them a deliverer" (*Judg* 3:15). In hearing the cry of the poor, we are asked to enter into the heart of God, who is always concerned for the needs of his children, especially those in greatest need. If we remain unresponsive to that cry, the poor might well cry out to the Lord against us, and we would incur guilt (cf. *Deut* 15:9) and turn away from the very heart of God.

9. The condition of the poor is a cry that, throughout human history, constantly challenges our lives, societies, political and economic systems, and, not least, the Church. On the wounded faces of the poor, we see the suffering of the innocent and, therefore, the suffering of Christ himself. At the same time, we should perhaps speak more correctly of the many faces of the poor and of poverty, since it is a multifaceted phenomenon. In fact, there are many forms of poverty: the poverty of those who lack material means of subsistence, the poverty of those who are socially marginalized and lack the means to give voice to their dignity and abilities, moral and spiritual poverty, cultural poverty, the poverty of those who find themselves in a condition of personal or social weakness or fragility, the poverty of those who have no rights, no space, no freedom.

10. In this sense, it can be said that the commitment to the poor and to removing the social and structural causes of poverty has gained importance in recent decades, but it remains insufficient. This is also the case because our societies often favor criteria for orienting life and politics that are marked by numerous inequalities. As a result, the old forms of poverty that we have become aware of and are trying to combat are being joined by new ones, sometimes more subtle and dangerous. From this point of view, it is to be welcomed that the United Nations has made the eradication of poverty one of its Millennium Goals.

11. A concrete commitment to the poor must also be accompanied by a change in mentality that can have an impact at the cultural level. In fact, the illusion of happiness derived from a comfortable life pushes many people towards a vision of life centered on the accumulation of wealth and social success at all costs, even at the expense of others and by taking advantage of unjust social ideals and political-economic systems that favor the strongest. Thus, in a world where the poor are increasingly numerous, we paradoxically see the growth of a wealthy elite, living in a bubble of comfort and luxury, almost in another world compared to ordinary people. This means that a culture still persists — sometimes well disguised — that discards others without even realizing it and tolerates with indifference that millions of people die of hunger or survive in conditions unfit for human beings. A few years ago, the photo of a lifeless child lying on a Mediterranean beach caused an uproar; unfortunately, apart from some momentary outcry, similar events are becoming increasingly irrelevant and seen as marginal news items.

12. We must not let our guard down when it comes to poverty. We should be particularly concerned about the serious conditions in which many people find themselves due to lack of food and water. In wealthy countries too, the growing

numbers of the poor are equally a source of concern. In Europe, more and more families find themselves unable to make it to the end of the month. In general, we are witnessing an increase in different kinds of poverty, which is no longer a single, uniform reality but now involves multiple forms of economic and social impoverishment, reflecting the spread of inequality even in largely affluent contexts. Let us not forget that "doubly poor are those women who endure situations of exclusion, mistreatment and violence, since they are frequently less able to defend their rights. Even so, we constantly witness among them impressive examples of daily heroism in defending and protecting their vulnerable families." [8] While significant changes are under way in some countries, "the organization of societies worldwide is still far from reflecting clearly that women possess the same dignity and identical rights as men. We say one thing with our words, but our decisions and reality tell another story," [9] especially if we consider the numbers of women who are in fact destitute.

Ideological prejudices

13. Looking beyond the data — which is sometimes "interpreted" to convince us that the situation of the poor is not so serious — the overall reality is quite evident: "Some economic rules have proved effective for growth, but not for integral human development. Wealth has increased, but together with inequality, with the result that 'new forms of poverty are emerging.' The claim that the modern world has reduced poverty is made by measuring poverty with criteria from the past that do not correspond to present-day realities. In other times, for example, lack of access to electric energy was not considered a sign of poverty, nor was it a source of hardship. Poverty must always be understood and gauged in the context of the actual opportunities available in each concrete historical period." [10] Looking beyond specific situations and contexts, however, a 1984 document of the European Community declared that "'the poor' shall be taken to mean persons, families and groups of persons whose resources (material, cultural and social) are so limited as to exclude them from the minimum acceptable way of life in the Member States in which they live." [11] Yet if we acknowledge that all human beings have the same dignity, independent of their place of birth, the immense differences existing between countries and regions must not be ignored.

14. The poor are not there by chance or by blind and cruel fate. Nor, for most of them, is poverty a choice. Yet, there are those who still presume to make this claim, thus revealing their own blindness and cruelty. Of course, among the poor there are also those who do not want to work, perhaps because their ancestors, who worked all their lives, died poor. However, there are so many others — men and women — who nonetheless work from dawn to dusk, perhaps collecting

scraps or the like, even though they know that their hard work will only help them to scrape by, but never really improve their lives. Nor can it be said that most of the poor are such because they do not “deserve” otherwise, as maintained by that specious view of meritocracy that sees only the successful as “deserving.”

15. Christians too, on a number of occasions, have succumbed to attitudes shaped by secular ideologies or political and economic approaches that lead to gross generalizations and mistaken conclusions. The fact that some dismiss or ridicule charitable works, as if they were an obsession on the part of a few and not the burning heart of the Church’s mission, convinces me of the need to go back and re-read the Gospel, lest we risk replacing it with the wisdom of this world. The poor cannot be neglected if we are to remain within the great current of the Church’s life that has its source in the Gospel and bears fruit in every time and place.

CHAPTER TWO
GOD CHOOSES THE POOR

The choice of the poor

16. God is merciful love, and his plan of love, which unfolds and is fulfilled in history, is above all his descent and coming among us to free us from slavery, fear, sin and the power of death. Addressing their human condition with a merciful gaze and a heart full of love, he turned to his creatures and thus took care of their poverty. Precisely in order to share the limitations and fragility of our human nature, he himself became poor and was born in the flesh like us. We came to know him in the smallness of a child laid in a manger and in the extreme humiliation of the cross, where he shared our radical poverty, which is death. It is easy to understand, then, why we can also speak theologically of a preferential option on the part of God for the poor, an expression that arose in the context of the Latin American continent and in particular in the Puebla Assembly, but which has been well integrated into subsequent teachings of the Church. [12] This “preference” never indicates exclusivity or discrimination towards other groups, which would be impossible for God. It is meant to emphasize God’s actions, which are moved by compassion toward the poverty and weakness of all humanity. Wanting to inaugurate a kingdom of justice, fraternity and solidarity, God has a special place in his heart for those who are discriminated against and oppressed, and he asks us, his Church, to make a decisive and radical choice in favor of the weakest.

17. It is in this perspective that we can understand the numerous pages of the Old Testament in which God is presented as the friend and liberator of the poor, the one who hears the cry of the poor and intervenes to free them (cf. *Ps* 34:7). God, the refuge of the poor, denounces through the prophets — we recall in particular Amos and Isaiah — the injustices committed against the weakest, and exhorts Israel to renew its worship from within, because one cannot pray and offer sacrifice while oppressing the weakest and poorest. From the beginning of Scripture, God's love is vividly demonstrated by his protection of the weak and the poor, to the extent that he can be said to have a particular fondness for them. "God's heart has a special place for the poor... The entire history of our redemption is marked by the presence of the poor." [13]

Jesus, the poor Messiah

18. The Old Testament history of God's preferential love for the poor and his readiness to hear their cry — to which I have briefly alluded — comes to fulfillment in Jesus of Nazareth. [14] By his Incarnation, he "emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness" (*Phil* 2:7), and in that form he brought us salvation. His was a radical poverty, grounded in his mission to reveal fully God's love for us (cf. *Jn* 1:18; *1 Jn* 4:9). As Saint Paul puts it in his customarily brief but striking manner: "You know well the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich" (*2 Cor* 8:9).

19. The Gospel shows us that poverty marked every aspect of Jesus' life. From the moment he entered the world, Jesus knew the bitter experience of rejection. The Evangelist Luke tells how Joseph and Mary, who was about to give birth, arrived in Bethlehem, and then adds, poignantly, that "there was no place for them in the inn" (*Lk* 2:7). Jesus was born in humble surroundings and laid in a manger; then, to save him from being killed, they fled to Egypt (cf. *Mt* 2:13-15). At the dawn of his public ministry, after announcing in the synagogue of Nazareth that the year of grace which would bring joy to the poor was fulfilled in him, he was driven out of town (cf. *Lk* 4:14-30). He died as an outcast, led out of Jerusalem to be crucified (cf. *Mk* 15:22). Indeed, that is how Jesus' poverty is best described: he experienced the same exclusion that is the lot of the poor, the outcast of society. Jesus is a manifestation of this *privilegium pauperum*. He presented himself to the world not only as a poor Messiah, but also as the Messiah of and for the poor.

20. There are some clues about Jesus' social status. First of all, he worked as a craftsman or carpenter, *téktōn* (cf. *Mk* 6:3). These were people who earned their living by manual labor. Not owning land, they were considered inferior to farmers. When the baby Jesus was presented in the Temple by Joseph and Mary, his parents offered a pair of turtledoves or

pigeons (cf. *Lk* 2:22-24), which according to the prescriptions of the Book of Leviticus (cf. 12:8) was the offering of the poor. A fairly significant episode in the Gospel tells us how Jesus, together with his disciples, gathered heads of grain to eat as they passed through the fields (cf. *Mk* 2:23-28). Only the poor were allowed to do this gleaning in the fields. Moreover, Jesus says of himself: "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head" (*Mt* 8:20; *Lk* 9:58). He is, in fact, an itinerant teacher, whose poverty and precariousness are signs of his bond with the Father. They are also conditions for those who wish to follow him on the path of discipleship. In this way, the renunciation of goods, riches and worldly securities becomes a visible sign of entrusting oneself to God and his providence.

21. At the beginning of his public ministry, Jesus appeared in the synagogue of Nazareth reading the scroll of the prophet Isaiah and applying the prophet's words to himself: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor" (*Lk* 4:18; cf. *Is* 61:1). He thus reveals himself as the One who, in the here and now of history, comes to bring about God's loving closeness, which is above all a work of liberation for those who are prisoners of evil, and for the weak and the poor. The signs that accompany Jesus' preaching are manifestations of the love and compassion with which God looks upon the sick, the poor and sinners who, because of their condition, were marginalized by society and even people of faith. He opens the eyes of the blind, heals lepers, raises the dead and proclaims the good news to the poor: God is near, God loves you (cf. *Lk* 7:22). This explains why he proclaims: "Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God" (*Lk* 6:20). God shows a preference for the poor: the Lord's words of hope and liberation are addressed first of all to them. Therefore, even in their poverty or weakness, no one should feel abandoned. And the Church, if she wants to be Christ's Church, must be a Church of the Beatitudes, one that makes room for the little ones and walks poor with the poor, a place where the poor have a privileged place (cf. *Jas* 2:2-4).

22. In that time, the needy and the sick, lacking the necessities of life, frequently found themselves forced to beg. They thus bore the added burden of social shame, due to the belief that sickness and poverty were somehow linked to personal sin. Jesus firmly countered this mentality by insisting that God "makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous" (*Mt* 5:45). Indeed, he completely overturned that notion, as we see from the ending of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus: "Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony" (*Lk* 16:25).

23. It becomes clear, then, that "our faith in Christ, who became poor, and was always close to the poor and the outcast, is the basis of our concern for the integral development of society's most neglected members." [15] I often wonder, even though the teaching of Sacred Scripture is so clear about the poor, why many people continue to think that they can safely disregard the poor. For the moment, though, let us pursue our reflection on what the Scriptures have to tell us about our relationship with the poor and their essential place in the people of God.

Mercy towards the poor in the Bible

24. The Apostle John writes: "Those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen" (*1 Jn* 4:20). Similarly, in his reply to the scribe's question, Jesus quotes the two ancient commandments: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" (*Deut* 6:5), and "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (*Lev* 19:18), uniting them in a single commandment. The Evangelist Mark reports Jesus' response in these terms: "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these" (12:29-31).

25. The passage from the Book of Leviticus teaches love for one's neighbor, while other texts call for respect — if not also love — even for one's enemy: "When you come upon your enemy's ox or donkey going astray, you shall bring it back. When you see the donkey of one who hates you lying under its burden and you would hold back from setting it free, you must help to set it free" (*Ex* 23:4-5). Here the intrinsic value of respect for others is expressly stated: anyone in need, even an enemy, always deserves our assistance.

26. Jesus' teaching on the primacy of love for God is clearly complemented by his insistence that one cannot love God without extending one's love to the poor. Love for our neighbor is tangible proof of the authenticity of our love for God, as the Apostle John attests: "No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us... God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them" (*1 Jn* 4:12,16). The two loves are distinct yet inseparable. Even in cases where there is no explicit reference to God, the Lord himself teaches that every act of love for one's neighbor is in some way a reflection of divine charity: "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (*Mt* 25:40).

27. For this reason, works of mercy are recommended as a sign of the authenticity of worship, which, while giving praise to God, has the task of opening us to the transformation that the Spirit can bring about in us, so that we may all become an image of Christ and his mercy towards the weakest. In this sense, our relationship with the Lord, expressed in worship, also aims to free us from the risk of living our relationships according to a logic of calculation and self-interest. We are instead open to the gratuitousness that surrounds those who love one another and, therefore, share everything in common. In this regard, Jesus advises: "When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return, and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you" (*Lk* 14:12-14).

28. The Lord's appeal to show mercy to the poor culminates in the great parable of the last judgment (cf. *Mt* 25:31-46), which can serve as a vivid illustration of the Beatitude of the merciful. In that parable, the Lord offers us the key to our fulfillment in life; indeed, "if we seek the holiness pleasing to God's eyes, this text offers us one clear criterion on which we will be judged." [16] The clear and forceful words of the Gospel must be put into practice "without any 'ifs or buts' that could lessen their force. Our Lord made it very clear that holiness cannot be understood or lived apart from these demands." [17]

29. In the early Christian community, acts of charity were performed on the basis not of preliminary studies or advance planning, but directly following Jesus' example as presented in the Gospel. The Letter of James deals at length with the problem of relations between rich and poor, and asks the faithful two questions in order to examine the authenticity of their faith: "What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,' and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead" (2:14-17).

30. James goes on to say: "Your gold and silver have rusted, and their rust will be evidence against you, and it will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure for the last days. Listen! The wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. You have lived on the earth in luxury and in pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter" (5:3-5). These are powerful words, even if we would rather not hear them! A similar appeal can be found in the First Letter of John: "How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?" (3:17).

31. The message of God's word is "so clear and direct, so simple and eloquent, that no ecclesial interpretation has the right to relativize it. The Church's reflection on these texts ought not to obscure or weaken their force, but urge us to accept their exhortations with courage and zeal. Why complicate something so simple? Conceptual tools exist to heighten contact with the realities they seek to explain, not to distance us from them." [18]

32. Indeed, we find a clear ecclesial example of sharing goods and caring for the poor in the daily life of the first Christian community. We can recall in particular the way in which the question of the daily distribution of subsidies to widows was resolved (cf. *Acts* 6:1-6). This was not an easy problem, partly because some of these widows, who came from other countries, were sometimes neglected because they were foreigners. In fact, the episode recounted in the Acts of the Apostles highlights a certain discontent on the part of the Hellenists, the Jews who were culturally Greek. The Apostles do not respond with abstract words, but by placing charity towards all at the center, reorganizing assistance to widows by asking the community to seek wise and respected people to whom they could entrust food distribution, while they take care of preaching the Word.

33. When Paul went to Jerusalem to consult the Apostles lest somehow he "should be running or had run in vain" (*Gal* 2:2), he was asked not to forget the poor (cf. *Gal* 2:10). Therefore, he organized various collections in order to help the poor communities. Among the reasons for which Paul makes this gesture, the following stands out: "God loves a cheerful giver" (*2 Cor* 9:7). The word of God reminds those of us not normally prone to benevolent and disinterested gestures, that generosity to the poor actually benefits those who exercise it: God has a special love for them. In fact, the Bible is full of promises addressed to those who give generously to others: "Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and will be repaid in full" (*Prov* 19:17). "Give, and it will be given to you... for the measure you give will be the measure you get back" (*Lk* 6:38). "Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly" (*Is* 58:8). Of this, the early Christians had no doubt.

34. The life of the first ecclesial communities, described in the pages of the Bible and handed down to us as God's revealed word, has been given to us as an example to imitate, but also as a witness to the faith that works through charity and an enduring inspiration for generations yet to come. Throughout the centuries, those pages have moved the hearts of Christians to love and to perform works of charity, which, like fruitful seeds, never cease to produce a rich harvest.

CHAPTER THREE
A CHURCH FOR THE POOR

35. Three days after his election, my predecessor expressed to the representatives of the media his desire that care and attention for the poor be more clearly present in the Church: “How I would like a Church which is poor and for the poor!” [19]

36. This desire reflects the understanding that the Church “recognizes in those who are poor and who suffer, the likeness of its poor and suffering founder.” [20] Indeed, since the Church is called to identify with those who are least, at her core “[T]here can be no room for doubt or for explanations which weaken so clear a message… We have to state, without mincing words, that there is an inseparable bond between our faith and the poor.” [21] In this regard, we have numerous witnesses from disciples of Christ spanning almost two millennia. [22]

The true riches of the Church

37. Saint Paul recounts that among the faithful of the nascent Christian community not many were “wise according to the flesh, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth” (*1 Cor* 1:26). However, despite their poverty, the early Christians were clearly aware of the necessity to care for those who were most in need. Already at the dawn of Christianity, the Apostles laid their hands on seven men chosen from the community. To a certain extent, they integrated them into their own ministry, instituting them for the service — *diakonía* in Greek — of the poorest (cf. *Acts* 6:1-5). It is significant that the first disciple to bear witness to his faith in Christ to the point of shedding his blood was Stephen, who belonged to this group. In him, the witness of caring for the poor and of martyrdom are united.

38. A little less than two centuries later, another deacon, Saint Lawrence, will demonstrate his fidelity to Jesus Christ in a similar way by uniting martyrdom and service to the poor. [23] From Saint Ambrose’s account, we learn that Lawrence, a deacon in Rome during the pontificate of Pope Sixtus II, was forced by the Roman authorities to turn over the treasures of the Church. “The following day he brought the poor with him. Questioned about where the promised treasures might be, he pointed to the poor saying, ‘These are the treasures of the Church’.” [24] While narrating this event, Saint Ambrose asks: “What treasures does Jesus have that are more precious than those in which he loves to show himself?” [25] And, remembering that ministers of the Church must never neglect the care of the poor, much less accumulate goods for their own benefit, he says: “This task must be carried out with sincere faith and wise foresight. Certainly, if anyone derives

personal advantage from it, he commits a crime; but if he distributes the proceeds to the poor or redeems a prisoner, he performs a work of mercy." [26]

The Fathers of the Church and the Poor

39. From the first centuries, the Fathers of the Church recognized in the poor a privileged way to reach God, a special way to meet him. Charity shown to those in need was not only seen as a moral virtue, but a concrete expression of faith in the incarnate Word. The community of the faithful, sustained by the strength of the Holy Spirit, was rooted in being close to the poor, whom they considered not just an "appendage," but an essential part of Christ's living body. For example, while he was on his way to face martyrdom, Saint Ignatius of Antioch exhorted the community of Smyrna not to neglect the duty to carry out acts of charity for those most in need, admonishing them not to behave like those who oppose God. "But consider those who are of a different opinion with respect to the grace of Christ, which has come to us, how opposed they are to the will of God. They have no regard for love; no care for the widow, or the orphan, or the oppressed; of the bond, or of the free; of the hungry, or of the thirsty." [27] The Bishop of Smyrna, Polycarp, expressly stated that ministers of the Church should take care of the poor: "And let the presbyters be compassionate and merciful to all, bringing back those that wander, visiting all the sick, and not neglecting the widow, the orphan, or the poor, but always 'providing for that which is becoming in the sight of God and man'." [28] From these two witnesses, we see that the Church appears as a mother of the poor, a place of welcome and justice.

40. For his part, Saint Justin, who addressed his First Apology to Emperor Adrian, the Senate and people of Rome, explained that Christians bring all that they can to those in need because they see them as brothers and sisters in Christ. Writing about the assembly gathered in prayer on the first day of the week, he underscored that at the heart of the Christian liturgy, it is not possible to separate the worship of God from concern for the poor. Consequently, at a certain point in the celebration: "they who are well-to-do, and willing, give what each thinks fit; and what is collected is deposited with the president, who succors the orphans and widows, and those who, through sickness or any other cause, are in want, and those who are in bonds, and the strangers sojourning among us, and in a word takes care of all who are in need." [29] This demonstrates that the nascent Church did not separate belief from social action: faith without witness through concrete actions was considered dead, as Saint James taught us (cf. 2:17).

Saint John Chrysostom

41. Among the Eastern Fathers, perhaps the most ardent preacher on social justice was Saint John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople from the late 300s to the early 400s. In his homilies, he exhorted the faithful to recognize Christ in the needy: "Do you wish to honor the body of Christ? Do not allow it to be despised in its members, that is, in the poor, who have no clothes to cover themselves. Do not honor Christ's body here in church with silk fabrics, while outside you neglect it when it suffers from cold and nakedness... [The body of Christ on the altar] does not need cloaks, but pure souls; while the one outside needs much care. Let us therefore learn to think of and honor Christ as he wishes. For the most pleasing honor we can give to the one we want to venerate is that of doing what he himself desires, not what we devise... So you too, give him the honor he has commanded, and let the poor benefit from your riches. God does not need golden vessels, but golden souls." [30] Affirming with crystal clarity that, if the faithful do not encounter Christ in the poor who stand at the door, they will not be able to worship him even at the altar, he continues: "What advantage does Christ gain if the sacrificial table is laden with golden vessels, while he himself dies of hunger in the person of the poor? Feed the hungry first, and only afterward adorn the altar with what remains." [31] He understood the Eucharist, therefore, as a sacramental expression of the charity and justice that both preceded and accompanied it. That same charity and justice should perpetuate the Eucharist through love and attention to the poor.

42. Consequently, charity is not optional but a requirement of true worship. Chrysostom vehemently denounced excessive wealth connected with indifference for the poor. The attention due to them, rather than a mere social requirement, is a condition for salvation, which gives unjust wealth a condemnatory weight. "It is very cold and the poor man lies in rags, dying, freezing, shivering, with an appearance and clothing that should move you. You, however, red in the face and drunk, pass by. And how do you expect God to deliver you from misfortune?... You often adorn an unfeeling corpse, which no longer understands honor, with many varied and gilded garments. Yet you despise the one who feels pain, who is torn apart, tortured, tormented by hunger and cold." [32] This profound sense of social justice leads him to affirm that "not giving to the poor is stealing from them, defrauding them of their lives, because what we have belongs to them." [33]

Saint Augustine

43. Augustine's spiritual guide was Saint Ambrose, who insisted on the ethical requirement to share material goods: "What you give to the poor is not your property, but theirs. Why have you appropriated what was given for common use?" [34]

For the Bishop of Milan, almsgiving is justice restored, not a gesture of paternalism. In his preaching, mercy takes on a prophetic character: he denounces structures that accumulate things and reaffirms communion as the Church's vocation.

44. Formed in this tradition, the holy Bishop of Hippo taught for his part about the preferential love for the poor. A vigilant pastor and theologian of rare insight, he realizes that true ecclesial communion is expressed also in the communion of goods. In his Commentaries on the Psalms, he reminds us that true Christians do not neglect love for those most in need: "Observing your brothers and sisters, you know if they are in need, but if Christ dwells in you, also be charitable to strangers." [35] This sharing of goods therefore stems from theological charity and has as its ultimate goal the love of Christ. For Augustine, the poor are not just people to be helped, but the sacramental presence of the Lord.

45. The Doctor of Grace saw caring for the poor as concrete proof of the sincerity of faith. Anyone who says they love God and has no compassion for the needy is lying (cf. *1 Jn* 4:20). Commenting on Jesus' encounter with the rich young man and the "treasure in heaven" reserved for those who give their possessions to the poor (cf. *Mt* 19:21), Augustine puts the following words in the Lord's mouth: "I received the earth, I will give heaven; I received temporal goods, I will give back eternal goods; I received bread, I will give life... I have been given hospitality, but I will give a home; I was visited when I was sick, but I will give health; I was visited in prison, but I will give freedom. The bread you have given to my poor has been consumed, but the bread I will give will not only refresh you, but will never end." [36] The Almighty will not be outdone in generosity to those who serve the people most in need: the greater the love for the poor, the greater the reward from God.

46. This Christocentric and deeply ecclesial perspective leads us to affirm that offerings, when born of love, not only alleviate the needs of one's brother or sister, but also purify the heart of the giver, if he or she is willing to change. Indeed, in the words of Pseudo-Augustine: "almsgiving can be beneficial to you in erasing past sins, if you have amended your ways." [37] It is, so to speak, the ordinary path to conversion for those who wish to follow Christ with an undivided heart.

47. In a Church that recognizes in the poor the face of Christ and in material goods the instrument of charity, Augustine's thought remains a sure light. Today, fidelity to Augustine's teachings requires not only the study of his works, but also a readiness to live radically his call to conversion, which necessarily includes the service of charity.

48. Many other Fathers of the Church, both Eastern and Western, have spoken about the primacy of attention to the poor in the life and mission of every Christian. From this perspective, in summary, it can be said that patristic theology was

practical, aiming at a Church that was poor and for the poor, recalling that the Gospel is proclaimed correctly only when it impels us to touch the flesh of the least among us, and warning that doctrinal rigor without mercy is empty talk.

Care of the sick

49. Christian compassion has manifested itself in a particular way in the care of the sick and suffering. Based on the signs present in Jesus' public ministry — the healing of the blind, lepers and paralytics — the Church understands that caring for the sick, in whom she readily recognizes the crucified Lord, is an important part of her mission. During a plague in the city of Carthage, where he was Bishop, Saint Cyprian reminded Christians of the importance of caring for the sick: "This pestilence and plague, which seems so horrible and deadly, searches out the righteousness of each one, and examines the minds of the human race, to see whether the healthy serve the sick; whether relatives love each other with sincerity; whether masters have pity on their sick servants; whether doctors do not abandon the sick who beg for help." [38] The Christian tradition of visiting the sick, washing their wounds, and comforting the afflicted is not simply a philanthropic endeavor, but an ecclesial action through which the members of the Church "touch the suffering flesh of Christ." [39]

50. In the sixteenth century, Saint John of God founded the Hospitaller Order that bears his name, creating model hospitals that welcomed everyone, regardless of social or economic status. His famous expression, "Do good, my brothers!" became a motto for active charity towards the sick. At the same time, Saint Camillus de Lellis founded the Order of Ministers of the Sick — the Camillians — taking on the mission of serving the sick with total dedication. His rule commands: "Each person should ask the Lord for a motherly affection for their neighbor so that we may serve them with all charity, both in soul and body, because we desire, with the grace of God, to serve all the sick with the affection that a loving mother has for her only sick child." [40] In hospitals, on battlefields, in prisons, and on the streets, the Camillians have embodied the mercy of Christ the Physician.

51. Caring for the sick with maternal affection, as a mother cares for her child, many consecrated women have played an even greater role in providing healthcare to the poor. The Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul, the Hospital Sisters, the Little Sisters of Divine Providence, and many other women's congregations have become a maternal and discreet presence in hospitals, nursing homes and retirement homes. They have brought comfort, a listening ear, a presence, and above all, tenderness. They have built, often with their own hands, healthcare facilities in areas lacking medical assistance. They taught hygiene, assisted in childbirth and administered medicine with natural wisdom and deep

faith. Their homes became oases of dignity where no one was excluded. The touch of compassion was the first medicine. Saint Louise de Marillac wrote to her sisters, the Daughters of Charity, reminding them that "they have been singularly blessed by God for the service of the sick poor of the hospitals." [41]

52. Today, this legacy continues in Catholic hospitals, healthcare facilities in remote areas, clinics operating in jungles, shelters for drug addicts and in field hospitals in war zones. The Christian presence among the sick reveals that salvation is not an abstract idea, but concrete action. In the act of healing a wound, the Church proclaims that the Kingdom of God begins among the most vulnerable. In doing so, she remains faithful to the One who said, "I was sick and you visited me" (*Mt* 25:36). When the Church kneels beside a leper, a malnourished child or an anonymous dying person, she fulfills her deepest vocation: to love the Lord where he is most disfigured.

Care of the poor in monastic life

53. Monastic life, which originated in the silence of the desert, was from the outset a witness to solidarity. Monks and nuns left everything — wealth, prestige, family — not only because they despised worldly goods — *contemptus mundi* — but also to encounter the poor Christ in this radical detachment. Saint Basil the Great, in his Rule, saw no contradiction between the monks' life of prayer and contemplation and their work on behalf of the poor. For him, hospitality and care for the needy were an integral part of monastic spirituality, and monks, even after having left everything to embrace poverty, had to help the poorest with their work, because "in order to have enough to help the needy... it is clear that we must work diligently... This way of life is profitable not only for subduing the body, but also for charity towards our neighbor, so that through us God may provide enough for our weaker brothers and sisters." [42]

54. In Caesarea, where he was Bishop, he built a place known as *Basiliad*, which included lodgings, hospitals and schools for the poor and sick. The monk, therefore, was not only an ascetic, but also a servant. Basil thus demonstrated that to be close to God, one must be close to the poor. Concrete love was the criterion of holiness. Praying and caring, contemplating and healing, writing and welcoming: everything was an expression of the same love for Christ.

55. In the West, Saint Benedict of Norcia formulated a Rule that would become the backbone of European monastic spirituality. Welcoming the poor and pilgrims occupies a prominent place in the document: "The poor and pilgrims are to be received with all care and hospitality, for it is in them that Christ is received." [43] These were not just words: for centuries Benedictine monasteries were places of refuge for widows, abandoned children, pilgrims and beggars. For Benedict,

community life was a school of charity. Manual labor not only had a practical function, but also formed the heart for service. Sharing among the monks, caring for the sick and listening to the most vulnerable prepared them to welcome Christ who comes in the person of the poor and the stranger. Today, Benedictine monastic hospitality remains a sign of a Church that opens its doors, welcomes without asking and heals without demanding anything in return.

56. Over time, Benedictine monasteries became places for overcoming the culture of exclusion. Monks and nuns cultivated the land, produced food, prepared medicines and offered them, with simplicity, to those most in need. Their silent work was the leaven of a new civilization, where the poor were not a problem to be solved, but brothers and sisters to be welcomed. The rule of sharing, working together and helping the vulnerable established an economy of solidarity, in contrast to the logic of accumulation. The monks' witness showed that voluntary poverty, far from being misery, is a path of freedom and communion. They did not limit themselves to helping the poor: they became their neighbors, brothers and sisters in the same Lord. In the cells and cloisters, they created a mysticism of God's presence in the little ones.

57. In addition to providing material assistance, monasteries played a fundamental role in the cultural and spiritual formation of the humblest. In times of plague, war and famine, they were places where the needy found bread and medicine, but also dignity and a voice. It was there that orphans were educated, apprentices received training and ordinary people were taught agricultural techniques and how to read. Knowledge was shared as a gift and a responsibility. The abbot was both teacher and father, and the monastic school was a place of freedom through truth. Indeed, as John Cassian writes, the monk must be characterized by "humility of heart... which leads not to knowledge that puffs up, but to knowledge that enlightens through the fullness of charity." [44] By forming consciences and transmitting wisdom, monks contributed to a Christian pedagogy of inclusion. Culture, marked by faith, was shared with simplicity. Knowledge, illuminated by charity, became service. Monastic life thus revealed itself as a style of holiness and a concrete way to transform society.

58. The monastic tradition teaches us that prayer and charity, silence and service, cells and hospitals form a single spiritual fabric. The monastery is a place of listening and action, of worship and sharing. Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, the great Cistercian reformer, "firmly recalled the need for a sober and measured life, in the refectory as in monastic clothing and buildings, recommending the support and care of the poor." [45] For him, compassion was not an option, but the true path of following Christ. Monastic life, therefore, if faithful to its original vocation, shows that the Church is fully the bride of the

Lord only when she is also the sister of the poor. The cloister is not only a refuge from the world, but a school where one learns to serve it better. Where monks and nuns have opened their doors to the poor, the Church has revealed with humility and firmness that contemplation does not exclude mercy, but demands it as its purest fruit.

Freeing prisoners

59. Since apostolic times, the Church has seen the liberation of the oppressed as a sign of the Kingdom of God. Jesus himself proclaimed at the beginning of his public ministry: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives” (*Lk* 4:18). The early Christians, even in precarious conditions, prayed for and assisted their brothers and sisters who were prisoners, as the Acts of the Apostles (cf. 12:5; 24:23) and various writings of the Fathers attest. This mission of liberation has continued throughout the centuries through concrete actions, especially when the tragedy of slavery and imprisonment has marked entire societies.

60. Between the late twelfth and the early thirteenth centuries, when many Christians were captured in the Mediterranean or enslaved in wars, two religious orders arose: the Order of the Most Holy Trinity and of the Captives (Trinitarians), founded by Saint John of Matha and Saint Felix of Valois, and the Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mercy (Mercedarians), founded by Saint Peter Nolasco with the support of the Dominican Saint Raymond of Peñafort. These communities of consecrated persons were born with the specific charism of freeing Christians who had been enslaved, placing their own possessions at the disposal of the enslaved [46] and many times offering their own lives in exchange. The Trinitarians, with their motto *Gloria tibi Trinitas et captivis libertas* (Glory to you, O Trinity, and liberty to the captives), and the Mercedarians, who added a fourth vow [47] to the religious vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, testified that charity can be heroic. The liberation of prisoners is an expression of Trinitarian love: a God who frees not only from spiritual slavery but also from concrete oppression. The act of rescuing someone from slavery and captivity is seen as an extension of Christ’s redemptive sacrifice, whose blood is the price of our redemption (cf. *1 Cor* 6:20).

61. The original spirituality of these orders was deeply rooted in contemplation of the cross. Christ is the Redeemer of prisoners *par excellence*, and the Church, his Body, prolongs this mystery in time. [48] Religious did not see redemption as a political or economic action, but as a quasi-liturgical act, the sacramental offering of themselves. Many gave their own bodies to replace prisoners, literally fulfilling the commandment: “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (*Jn* 15:13). The tradition of these orders did not come to an end. On the contrary, it inspired new forms of

action in the face of modern forms of slavery: human trafficking, forced labor, sexual exploitation and various forms of dependency. [49] Christian charity is liberating when it becomes incarnate. Likewise, the mission of the Church, when she is faithful to her Lord, is at all times to proclaim liberation. Even today, when "millions of people — children, women and men of all ages — are deprived of their freedom and forced to live in conditions akin to slavery," [50] this legacy is carried on by these orders and other institutions and congregations working in urban peripheries, conflict zones and migration routes. When the Church bends down to break the new chains that bind the poor, she becomes a paschal sign.

62. We cannot conclude this reflection on people deprived of their freedom without mentioning those in various prisons and detention centers. In this regard, we recall the words that Pope Francis addressed to a group of prisoners: "For me, entering a prison is always an important moment, because prison is a place of great humanity... Humanity that is tried, sometimes worn down by difficulties, guilt, judgments, misunderstandings, suffering, but at the same time full of strength, desire for forgiveness, and a desire for redemption." [51] This desire, among other things, has also been taken up by the orders devoted to the ransom of prisoners as a preferential service to the Church. As Saint Paul proclaimed: "For freedom Christ has set us free" (*Gal* 5:1). This freedom is not only interior: it manifests itself in history as love that cares for and frees us from every bond of slavery.

Witnesses of evangelical poverty

63. In the thirteenth century, faced with the growth of cities, the concentration of wealth and the emergence of new forms of poverty, the Holy Spirit gave rise to a new type of consecration in the Church: the mendicant orders. Unlike the stable monastic model, mendicants adopted an itinerant life, without personal or communal property, entrusting themselves entirely to providence. They did not merely serve the poor: they made themselves poor with them. They saw the city as a new desert and the marginalized as new spiritual teachers. These orders, such as the Franciscans, Dominicans, Augustinians and Carmelites, represented an evangelical revolution, in which a simple and poor lifestyle became a prophetic sign for mission, reviving the experience of the first Christian community (cf. *Acts* 4:32). The witness of the mendicants challenged both clerical opulence and the coldness of urban society.

64. Saint Francis of Assisi became the icon of this spiritual springtime. By embracing poverty, he wanted to imitate Christ, who was poor, naked and crucified. In his Rule, he asks that "the brothers should not appropriate anything, neither house, nor place, nor anything else. And as pilgrims and strangers in this world, serving the Lord in poverty and humility, they

should go about begging with confidence, and should not be ashamed, because the Lord made himself poor for us in this world." [52] His life was one of continuous self-emptying: from the palace to the leper, from eloquence to silence, from possession to total gift. Francis did not found a social service organization, but an evangelical fraternity. In the poor, he saw brothers and sisters, living images of the Lord. His mission was to be with them, and he did so through a solidarity that overcame distances and a compassionate love. Francis' poverty was relational: it led him to become neighbor, equal to, or indeed lesser than others. His holiness sprang from the conviction that Christ can only be truly received by giving oneself generously to one's brothers and sisters.

65. Saint Clare of Assisi, who was inspired by Francis, founded the Order of Poor Ladies, later called the Poor Clares. Her spiritual struggle consisted in faithfully maintaining the ideal of radical poverty. She refused the papal privileges that could have guaranteed material security for her monastery and, with firmness, obtained from Pope Gregory IX the so-called *Privilegium Paupertatis*, which guaranteed the right to live without any material goods. [53] This choice expressed her total trust in God and her awareness that voluntary poverty was a form of freedom and prophecy. Clare taught her sisters that Christ was their only inheritance and that nothing should obscure their communion with him. Her prayerful and hidden life was a cry against worldliness and a silent defense of the poor and forgotten.

66. Saint Dominic de Guzmán, a contemporary of Francis, founded the Order of Preachers, with a different charism but the same radicalism of life. He wanted to proclaim the Gospel with the authority that comes from a life of poverty, convinced that the Truth needs witnesses of integrity. The example of poverty in their lives accompanied the Word they preached. Free from the weight of earthly goods, the Dominican Friars were better able to dedicate themselves to their principal work of preaching. They went to the cities, especially the universities, in order to teach the truth about God. [54] In their dependence on others, they showed that faith is not imposed but offered. And by living among the poor, they learned the truth of the Gospel "from below," as disciples of the humiliated Christ.

67. The mendicant orders were therefore a living response to exclusion and indifference. They did not expressly propose social reforms, but an individual and communal conversion to the logic of the Kingdom. For them, poverty was not a consequence of a scarcity of goods, but a free choice: to make themselves small in order to welcome the small. As Thomas of Celano said of Francis: "He showed that he loved the poor intensely... He often stripped himself naked to clothe the poor, whom he sought to resemble." [55] Beggars became the symbol of a pilgrim, humble and fraternal Church, living

among the poor not to proselytize but as an expression of their true identity. They teach us that the Church is a light when she strips herself of everything, and that holiness passes through a humble heart devoted to the least among us.

The Church and the education of the poor

68. Addressing educators, Pope Francis recalled that education has always been one of the highest expressions of Christian charity: "Yours is a mission full of obstacles as well as joys... A mission of love, because you cannot teach without loving." [56] In this sense, since ancient times, Christians have understood that knowledge liberates, gives dignity, and brings us closer to the truth. For the Church, teaching the poor was an act of justice and faith. Inspired by the example of the Master who taught people divine and human truths, she took on the mission of forming children and young people, especially the poorest, in truth and love. This mission took shape with the founding of congregations dedicated to education.

69. In the sixteenth century, Saint Joseph Calasanz, struck by the lack of education and training among the poor young people of Rome, established Europe's first free public school in some rooms adjacent to the church of Santa Dorotea in Trastevere. This was the seed from which the Poor Clerics Regular of the Mother of God of the Pious Schools, known as the Piarists, would later emerge and develop, though not without difficulty. Their goal was that of transmitting to young people "not only secular knowledge but also the wisdom of the Gospel, teaching them to recognize, in their personal lives and in history, the loving action of God the Creator and Redeemer." [57] In fact, we can consider this courageous priest as the "true founder of the modern Catholic school, aimed at the integral formation of people and open to all." [58] Inspired by the same sensitivity, Saint John Baptist de La Salle, realizing the injustice caused by the exclusion of the children of workers and ordinary people from the educational system of France at that time, founded the Brothers of the Christian Schools in the seventeenth century, with the ideal of offering them free education, solid formation, and a fraternal environment. De La Salle saw the classroom as a place for human development, but also for conversion. In his colleges, prayer, method, discipline and sharing were combined. Each child was considered a unique gift from God, and the act of teaching was a service to the Kingdom of God.

70. In the nineteenth century, also in France, Saint Marcellin Champagnat founded the Institute of the Marist Brothers of the Schools. "He was sensitive to the spiritual and educational needs of his time, especially to religious ignorance and the situation of neglect experienced in a particular way by the young." [59] He dedicated himself wholeheartedly to the

mission of educating and evangelizing children and young people, especially those most in need, during a period when access to education continued to be the privilege of a few. In the same spirit, Saint John Bosco began the great work of the Salesians in Italy based on the three principles of the "preventive method" — reason, religion, and loving kindness. [60] Blessed Antonio Rosmini founded the Institute of Charity, in which "intellectual charity" was placed alongside "material charity," with "spiritual-pastoral charity" at the top, as an indispensable dimension of any charitable action aimed at the good and integral development of the person. [61]

71. Many female congregations were protagonists of this pedagogical revolution. Founded in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Ursulines, the Sisters of the Company of Mary Our Lady, the Maestre Pie and many others, stepped into the spaces where the state was absent. They created schools in small villages, suburbs and working-class neighborhoods. In particular, the education of girls became a priority. The religious sisters taught literacy, evangelized, took care of practical matters of daily life, elevated their spirits through the cultivation of the arts, and, above all, formed consciences. Their pedagogy was simple: closeness, patience and gentleness. They taught by the example of their lives before teaching with words. In times of widespread illiteracy and systemic exclusion, these consecrated women were beacons of hope. Their mission was to form hearts, teach people to think and promote dignity. By combining a life of piety and dedication to others, they fought abandonment with the tenderness of those who educate in the name of Christ.

72. For the Christian faith, the education of the poor is not a favor but a duty. Children have a right to knowledge as a fundamental requirement for the recognition of human dignity. Teaching them affirms their value, giving them the tools to transform their reality. Christian tradition considers knowledge a gift from God and a community responsibility. Christian education does not only form professionals, but also people open to goodness, beauty and truth. Catholic schools, therefore, when they are faithful to their name, are places of inclusion, integral formation and human development. By combining faith and culture, they sow the seeds of the future, honor the image of God and build a better society.

Accompanying migrants

73. The experience of migration accompanies the history of the People of God. Abraham sets out without knowing where he is going; Moses leads the pilgrim people through the desert; Mary and Joseph flee with the child Jesus to Egypt. Christ himself, who "came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him" (*Jn* 1:11), lived among us as a stranger.

For this reason, the Church has always recognized in migrants a living presence of the Lord who, on the day of judgment, will say to those on his right: "I was a stranger and you welcomed me" (*Mt* 25:35).

74. In the nineteenth century, when millions of Europeans emigrated in search of better living conditions, two great saints distinguished themselves in the pastoral care of migrants: Saint John Baptist Scalabrini and Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini. Scalabrini, Bishop of Piacenza, founded the Missionaries of Saint Charles to accompany migrants to their destinations, offering them spiritual, legal and material assistance. He saw migrants as recipients of a new evangelization, warning of the risks of exploitation and loss of faith in a foreign land. Responding generously to the charism that the Lord had given him, "Scalabrini looked forward to a world and a Church without barriers, where no one was a foreigner." [62] Saint Frances Cabrini, born in Italy and a naturalized American, was the first citizen of the United States of America to be canonized. To fulfill her mission of assisting migrants, she crossed the Atlantic several times. "Armed with remarkable boldness, she started schools, hospitals and orphanages from nothing for the masses of the poor who ventured into the new world in search of work. Not knowing the language and lacking the wherewithal to find a respectable place in American society, they were often victims of the unscrupulous. Her motherly heart, which allowed her no rest, reached out to them everywhere: in hovels, prisons and mines." [63] In the Holy Year of 1950, Pope Pius XII proclaimed her Patroness of All Migrants. [64]

75. The Church's tradition of working for and with migrants continues, and today this service is expressed in initiatives such as refugee reception centers, border missions and the efforts of Caritas Internationalis and other institutions. Contemporary teaching clearly reaffirms this commitment. Pope Francis has recalled that the Church's mission to migrants and refugees is even broader, insisting that "our response to the challenges posed by contemporary migration can be summed up in four verbs: welcome, protect, promote and integrate. Yet these verbs do not apply only to migrants and refugees. They describe the Church's mission to all those living in the existential peripheries, who need to be welcomed, protected, promoted and integrated." [65] He also said: "Every human being is a child of God! He or she bears the image of Christ! We ourselves need to see, and then to enable others to see, that migrants and refugees do not only represent a problem to be solved, but are brothers and sisters to be welcomed, respected and loved. They are an occasion that Providence gives us to help build a more just society, a more perfect democracy, a more united country, a more fraternal world and a more open and evangelical Christian community." [66] The Church, like a mother, accompanies those who are walking. Where the world sees threats, she sees children; where walls are built, she builds bridges. She knows that her

proclamation of the Gospel is credible only when it is translated into gestures of closeness and welcome. And she knows that in every rejected migrant, it is Christ himself who knocks at the door of the community.

At the side of the least among us

76. Christian holiness often flourishes in the most forgotten and wounded places of humanity. The poorest of the poor — those who lack not only material goods but also a voice and the recognition of their dignity — have a special place in God's heart. They are the beloved of the Gospel, the heirs to the Kingdom (cf. *Lk* 6:20). It is in them that Christ continues to suffer and rise again. It is in them that the Church rediscovers her call to show her most authentic self.

77. Saint Teresa of Calcutta, canonized in 2016, has become a universal icon of charity lived to the fullest extent in favor of the most destitute, those discarded by society. Foundress of the Missionaries of Charity, she dedicated her life to the dying abandoned on the streets of India. She gathered the rejected, washed their wounds and accompanied them to the moment of death with the tenderness of prayer. Her love for the poorest of the poor meant that she did not only take care of their material needs, but also proclaimed the good news of the Gospel to them: "We are wanting to proclaim the good news to the poor that God loves them, that we love them, that they are somebody to us, that they too have been created by the same loving hand of God, to love and to be loved. Our poor people are great people, are very lovable people, they do not need our pity and sympathy, they need our understanding love. They need our respect; they need that we treat them with dignity." [67] All this came from a deep spirituality that saw service to the poorest as the fruit of prayer and love, the source of true peace, as Pope John Paul II reminded the pilgrims who came to Rome for her beatification: "Where did Mother Teresa find the strength to place herself completely at the service of others? She found it in prayer and in the silent contemplation of Jesus Christ, his Holy Face, his Sacred Heart. She herself said as much: 'The fruit of silence is prayer; the fruit of prayer is faith; the fruit of faith is love; the fruit of love is service.' It was prayer that filled her heart with Christ's own peace and enabled her to radiate that peace to others." [68] Teresa did not consider herself a philanthropist or an activist, but a bride of Christ crucified, serving with total love her suffering brothers and sisters.

78. In Brazil, Saint Dulce of the Poor — known as "the good angel of Bahia" — embodied the same evangelical spirit with Brazilian characteristics. Referring to her and two other religious women canonized during the same celebration, Pope Francis recalled their love for the most marginalized members of society and said that the new saints "show us that the consecrated life is a journey of love at the existential peripheries of the world." [69] Sister Dulce responded to

precariousness with creativity, obstacles with tenderness and need with unshakeable faith. She began by taking in the sick in a chicken coop and from there founded one of the largest social services in the country. She assisted thousands of people a day, without ever losing her gentleness, making herself poor with the poor for the love of the Poorest One. She lived with little, prayed fervently and served with joy. Her faith did not distance her from the world, but drew her even more deeply into the pain of the least among us.

79. We could also mention individuals such as Saint Benedict Menni and the Sisters Hospitallers of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, who worked alongside people with disabilities; Saint Charles de Foucauld among the communities of the Sahara; Saint Katharine Drexel for the most underprivileged groups in North America; Sister Emmanuelle, with the garbage collectors in the Ezbet El Nakhl neighborhood of Cairo; and many others. Each in their own way discovered that the poorest are not only objects of our compassion, but teachers of the Gospel. It is not a question of "bringing" God to them, but of encountering him among them. All of these examples teach us that serving the poor is not a gesture to be made "from above," but an encounter between equals, where Christ is revealed and adored. Saint John Paul II reminded us that "there is a special presence of Christ in the poor, and this requires the Church to make a preferential option for them." [70] Therefore, when the Church bends down to care for the poor, she assumes her highest posture.

Popular Movements

80. We must also recognize that, throughout centuries of Christian history, helping the poor and advocating for their rights has not only involved individuals, families, institutions, or religious communities. There have been, and still are, various popular movements made up of lay people and led by popular leaders, who have often been viewed with suspicion and even persecuted. I am referring to "all those persons who journey, not as individuals, but as a closely-bound community of all and for all, one that refuses to leave the poor and vulnerable behind… 'Popular' leaders, then, are those able to involve everyone… They do not shun or fear those young people who have experienced hurt or borne the weight of the cross." [71]

81. These popular leaders know that solidarity "also means fighting against the structural causes of poverty and inequality; of the lack of work, land and housing; and of the denial of social and labor rights. It means confronting the destructive effects of the empire of money… Solidarity, understood in its deepest sense, is a way of making history, and this is what the popular movements are doing." [72] For this reason, when different institutions think about the needs of the poor, it is necessary to "include popular movements and invigorate local, national and international governing structures with that

torrent of moral energy that springs from including the excluded in the building of a common destiny." [73] Popular movements, in fact, invite us to overcome "the idea of social policies being a policy *for* the poor, but never *with* the poor and never *of* the poor, much less part of a project which can bring people back together." [74] If politicians and professionals do not listen to them, "democracy atrophies, turns into a slogan, a formality; it loses its representative character and becomes disembodied, since it leaves out the people in their daily struggle for dignity, in the building of their future." [75] The same must be said of the institutions of the Church.

CHAPTER FOUR
A HISTORY THAT CONTINUES

The century of the Church's Social Doctrine

82. The acceleration of technological and social change in the past two centuries, with all its contradictions and conflicts, not only had an impact on the lives of the poor but also became the object of debate and reflection on their part. The various movements of workers, women and young people, and the fight against racial discrimination, gave rise to a new appreciation of the dignity of those on the margins of society. The Church's social doctrine also emerged from this matrix. Its analysis of Christian revelation in the context of modern social, labor, economic and cultural issues would not have been possible without the contribution of the laity, men and women alike, who grappled with the great issues of their time. At their side were those men and women religious who embodied a Church forging ahead in new directions. The epochal change we are now undergoing makes even more necessary a constant interaction between the faithful and the Church's Magisterium, between ordinary citizens and experts, between individuals and institutions. Here too, it needs to be acknowledged once more that reality is best viewed from the sidelines, and that the poor are possessed of unique insights indispensable to the Church and to humanity as a whole.

83. The Church's Magisterium in the past 150 years is a veritable treasury of significant teachings concerning the poor. The Bishops of Rome have given voice to new insights refined through a process of ecclesial discernment. By way of example, in his Encyclical Letter Rerum Novarum, Leo XIII addressed the labor question, pointing to the intolerable living conditions of many industrial workers and arguing for the establishment of a just social order. Other popes also spoke on this theme. Saint John XXIII, in his Encyclical Mater et Magistra (1961), called for justice on a global scale: rich countries could no

longer remain indifferent to countries suffering from hunger and extreme poverty; instead, they were called upon to assist them generously with all their goods.

84. The Second Vatican Council represented a milestone in the Church's understanding of the poor in God's saving plan. Although this theme remained marginal in the preparatory documents, Saint John XXIII, in his Radio Message of 11 September 1962, a month before the opening of the Council, called attention to the issue. In his memorable words, "the Church presents herself as she is and as she wishes to be: the Church of all and in particular the Church of the poor." [76] The intense efforts of bishops, theologians and experts concerned with the renewal of the Church — with the support of Saint John XXIII himself — gave the Council a new direction. The centrality of Christ in these considerations both on a doctrinal and social level would prove fundamental. Many Council Fathers supported this approach, as eloquently expressed by Cardinal Lercaro in his intervention of 6 December 1962: "The mystery of Christ in the Church has always been and today is, in a particular way, the mystery of Christ in the poor." [77] He went on to say that, "this is not simply one theme among others, but in some sense the only theme of the Council as a whole." [78] The Archbishop of Bologna, in preparing the text for this intervention, noted the following: "This is the hour of the poor, of the millions of the poor throughout the world. This is the hour of the mystery of the Church as mother of the poor. This is the hour of the mystery of Christ, present especially in the poor." [79] There was a growing sense of the need for a new image of Church, one simpler and more sober, embracing the entire people of God and its presence in history. A Church more closely resembling her Lord than worldly powers and working to foster a concrete commitment on the part of all humanity to solving the immense problem of poverty in the world.

85. At the opening of the second session of the Council, Saint Paul VI took up this concern voiced by his predecessor, namely that the Church looks with particular attention "to the poor, the needy, the afflicted, the hungry, the suffering, the imprisoned, that is, she looks to all humanity that suffers and weeps: she is part of them by evangelical right." [80] In his General Audience of 11 November 1964, he pointed out that "the poor are representatives of Christ," and compared the image of the Lord in the poor to that seen in the Pope. He affirmed this truth with these words: "The representation of Christ in the poor is universal; every poor person reflects Christ; that of the Pope is personal... The poor man and Peter can be one in the same person, clothed in a double representation; that of poverty and that of authority." [81] In this way, the intrinsic link between the Church and the poor was expressed symbolically and with unprecedented clarity.

86. The Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, building on the teachings of the Church Fathers, forcefully reaffirms the universal destination of earthly goods and the social function of property that derives from it. The Constitution states that "God destined the earth and all it contains for all people and nations so that all created things would be shared fairly by all humankind under the guidance of justice tempered by charity... In their use of things people should regard the external goods they lawfully possess as not just their own but common to others as well, in the sense that they can benefit others as well as themselves. Therefore, everyone has the right to possess a sufficient amount of the earth's goods for themselves and their family... Persons in extreme necessity are entitled to take what they need from the riches of others... By its nature, private property has a social dimension that is based on the law of the common destination of earthly goods. Whenever the social aspect is forgotten, ownership can often become the object of greed and a source of serious disorder." [82] This conviction was reiterated by Saint Paul VI in his Encyclical Populorum Progressio. There we read that no one can feel authorized to "appropriate surplus goods solely for his [or her] own private use when others lack the bare necessities of life." [83] In his address to the United Nations, Pope Paul VI spoke as the advocate of poor peoples [84] and urged the international community to build a world of solidarity.

87. With Saint John Paul II, the Church's preferential relationship with the poor was consolidated, particularly from a doctrinal standpoint. His teaching saw in the option for the poor a "special form of primacy in the exercise of Christian charity, to which the whole tradition of the Church bears witness." [85] In his Encyclical Sollicitudo Rei Socialis, he went on to say: "Today, furthermore, given the worldwide dimension which the social question has assumed, this love of preference for the poor, and the decisions which it inspires in us, cannot but embrace the immense multitudes of the hungry, the needy, the homeless, those without medical care and, above all, those without hope of a better future. It is impossible not to take account of the existence of these realities. To ignore them would mean becoming like the 'rich man' who pretended not to know the beggar Lazarus lying at his gate (cf. *Lk* 16:19-31)." [86] Saint John Paul II's teaching on work is likewise important for our consideration of the active role that the poor ought to play in the renewal of the Church and society, thus leaving behind a certain "paternalism" that limited itself to satisfying only the immediate needs of the poor. In his Encyclical Laborem Exercens, he forthrightly stated that "human work is a key , probably the essential key , to the whole social question." [87]

88. Amid the multiple crises that marked the beginning of the third millennium, the teaching of Benedict XVI took a more distinctly political turn. Hence, in the Encyclical Caritas in Veritate, he affirms that "the more we strive to secure a common

good corresponding to the real needs of our neighbors, the more effectively we love them." [88] He observed, moreover, that "hunger is not so much dependent on lack of material things as on shortage of social resources, the most important of which are institutional. What is missing, in other words, is a network of economic institutions capable of guaranteeing regular access to sufficient food and water for nutritional needs, and also capable of addressing the primary needs and necessities ensuing from genuine food crises, whether due to natural causes or political irresponsibility, nationally and internationally." [89]

89. Pope Francis recognized that in recent decades, alongside the teachings of the Bishops of Rome, national and regional Bishops' Conferences have increasingly spoken out. He could personally attest, for example, to the particular commitment of the Latin American episcopate to rethinking the Church's relationship with the poor. In the immediate post-conciliar period, in almost all Latin American countries, there was a strong sense of the Church's need to identify with the poor and to participate actively in securing their freedom. The Church was moved by the masses of the poor suffering from unemployment, underemployment, unjust wages and sub-standard living conditions. The martyrdom of Saint Oscar Romero, the Archbishop of San Salvador, was a powerful witness and an inspiration for the Church. He had made his own the plight of the vast majority of his flock and made them the center of his pastoral vision. The Conferences of the Latin American Bishops held in Medellín, Puebla, Santo Domingo and Aparecida were also significant events for the life of the Church as a whole. For my part, having served as a missionary in Peru for many years, I am greatly indebted to this process of ecclesial discernment, which Pope Francis wisely linked to that of other particular Churches, especially those in the global South. I would now like to take up two specific themes of this episcopal teaching.

Structures of sin that create poverty and extreme inequality

90. At Medellín, the bishops declared themselves in favor of a preferential option for the poor: "Christ our Savior not only loved the poor, but, 'being rich, he became poor.' He lived a life of poverty, focused his mission on preaching their liberation, and founded his Church as a sign of this poverty in our midst... The poverty endured by so many of our brothers and sisters cries out for justice, solidarity, witness, commitment and efforts directed to ending it, so that the saving mission entrusted by Christ may be fully accomplished." [90] The bishops stated forcefully that the Church, to be fully faithful to her vocation, must not only share the condition of the poor, but also stand at their side and work actively for their integral

development. Faced with a situation of worsening poverty in Latin America, the Puebla Conference confirmed the Medellín decision in favor of a frank and prophetic option for the poor and described structures of injustice as a "social sin."

91. Charity has the power to change reality; it is a genuine force for change in history. It is the source that must inspire and guide every effort to "resolve the structural causes of poverty," [91] and to do so with urgency. It is my hope that we will see more and more "politicians capable of sincere and effective dialogue aimed at healing the deepest roots — and not simply the appearances — of the evils in our world." [92] For "it is a matter of hearing the cry of entire peoples, the poorest peoples of the earth." [93]

92. We must continue, then, to denounce the "dictatorship of an economy that kills," and to recognize that "while the earnings of a minority are growing exponentially, so too is the gap separating the majority from the prosperity enjoyed by those happy few. This imbalance is the result of ideologies that defend the absolute autonomy of the marketplace and financial speculation. Consequently, they reject the right of states, charged with vigilance for the common good, to exercise any form of control. A new tyranny is being born, invisible and often virtual, which unilaterally and relentlessly imposes its own laws and rules." [94] There is no shortage of theories attempting to justify the present state of affairs or to explain that economic thinking requires us to wait for invisible market forces to resolve everything. Nevertheless, the dignity of every human person must be respected today, not tomorrow, and the extreme poverty of all those to whom this dignity is denied should constantly weigh upon our consciences.

93. In his Encyclical *Dilexit Nos*, Pope Francis reminded us that social sin consolidates a "structure of sin" within society, and is frequently "part of a dominant mindset that considers normal or reasonable what is merely selfishness and indifference. This then gives rise to social alienation." [95] It then becomes normal to ignore the poor and live as if they do not exist. It then likewise seems reasonable to organize the economy in such a way that sacrifices are demanded of the masses in order to serve the needs of the powerful. Meanwhile, the poor are promised only a few "drops" that trickle down, until the next global crisis brings things back to where they were. A genuine form of alienation is present when we limit ourselves to theoretical excuses instead of seeking to resolve the concrete problems of those who suffer. Saint John Paul II had already observed that, "a society is alienated if its forms of social organization, production and consumption make it more difficult to offer the gift of self and to establish solidarity between people." [96]

94. We need to be increasingly committed to resolving the structural causes of poverty. This is a pressing need that "cannot be delayed, not only for the pragmatic reason of its urgency for the good order of society, but because society needs to be cured of a sickness which is weakening and frustrating it, and which can only lead to new crises. Welfare projects, which meet certain urgent needs, should be considered merely provisional responses." [97] I can only state once more that inequality "is the root of social ills." [98] Indeed, "it frequently becomes clear that, in practice, human rights are not equal for all." [99]

95. As it is, "the current model, with its emphasis on success and self-reliance, does not appear to favor an investment in efforts to help the slow, the weak or the less talented to find opportunities in life." [100] The same questions keep coming back to us. Does this mean that the less gifted are not human beings? Or that the weak do not have the same dignity as ourselves? Are those born with fewer opportunities of lesser value as human beings? Should they limit themselves merely to surviving? The worth of our societies, and our own future, depends on the answers we give to these questions. Either we regain our moral and spiritual dignity or we fall into a cesspool. Unless we stop and take this matter seriously, we will continue, openly or surreptitiously, "to legitimize the present model of distribution, where a minority believes that it has the right to consume in a way which can never be universalized, since the planet could not even contain the waste products of such consumption." [101]

96. One structural issue that cannot realistically be resolved from above and needs to be addressed as quickly as possible has to do with the locations, neighborhoods, homes and cities where the poor live and spend their time. All of us appreciate the beauty of "those cities which overcome paralyzing mistrust, integrate those who are different and make this very integration a new factor of development! How attractive are those cities which, even in their architectural design, are full of spaces which connect, relate and favor the recognition of others!" [102] Yet, at the same time, "we cannot fail to consider the effects on people's lives of environmental deterioration, current models of development and the throwaway culture." [103] For "the deterioration of the environment and of society affects the most vulnerable people on the planet." [104]

97. All the members of the People of God have a duty to make their voices heard, albeit in different ways, in order to point out and denounce such structural issues, even at the cost of appearing foolish or naïve. Unjust structures need to be recognized and eradicated by the force of good, by changing mindsets but also, with the help of science and technology,

by developing effective policies for societal change. It must never be forgotten that the Gospel message has to do not only with an individual's personal relationship with the Lord, but also with something greater: "the Kingdom of God (cf. *Lk* 4:43); it is about loving God who reigns in our world. To the extent that he reigns within us, the life of society will be a setting for universal fraternity, justice, peace and dignity. Both Christian preaching and life, then, are meant to have an impact on society. We are seeking God's Kingdom." [105]

98. Finally, in a document that was not initially well received by everyone, we find a reflection that remains timely today: "The defenders of orthodoxy are sometimes accused of passivity, indulgence, or culpable complicity regarding the intolerable situations of injustice and the political regimes which prolong them. Spiritual conversion, the intensity of the love of God and neighbor, zeal for justice and peace, the Gospel meaning of the poor and of poverty, are required of everyone, and especially of pastors and those in positions of responsibility. The concern for the purity of the faith demands giving the answer of effective witness in the service of one's neighbor, the poor and the oppressed in particular, in an integral theological fashion." [106]

The poor as subjects

99. The life of the universal Church was enriched by the discernment of the Aparecida Conference, in which the Latin American bishops made clear that the Church's preferential option for the poor "is implicit in the Christological faith in the God who became poor for us, so as to enrich us with his poverty." [107] The Aparecida Document situates the Church's mission in the present context of a globalized world marked by new and dramatic imbalances. [108] In their Final Message, the bishops wrote: "The stark differences between rich and poor invite us to work with greater commitment to being disciples capable of sharing the table of life, the table of all the sons and daughters of the Father, a table that is open and inclusive, from which no one is excluded. We therefore reaffirm our preferential and evangelical option for the poor." [109]

100. At the same time, the Document, taking up a theme treated in earlier Conferences of the Latin American episcopate, insists on the need to consider marginalized communities as *subjects* capable of creating their own culture, rather than as *objects* of charity on the part of others. This means that such communities have the right to embrace the Gospel and to celebrate and communicate their faith in accord with the values present within their own cultures. Their experience of poverty gives them the ability to recognize aspects of reality that others cannot see; for this reason, society needs to listen to them. The same holds true for the Church, which should regard positively their "popular" practice of the faith. A fine

passage from the Aparecida Document can help us reflect on this point and our proper response: “Only the closeness that makes us friends enables us to appreciate deeply the values of the poor today, their legitimate desires, and their own manner of living the faith... Day by day, the poor become agents of evangelization and of comprehensive human promotion: they educate their children in the faith, engage in ongoing solidarity among relatives and neighbors, constantly seek God, and give life to the Church’s pilgrimage. In the light of the Gospel, we recognize their immense dignity and their sacred worth in the eyes of Christ, who was poor like them and excluded among them. Based on this experience of faith, we will share with them the defense of their rights.” [110]

101. All this entails one aspect of the option for the poor that we must constantly keep in mind, namely that it demands of us an attitude of attentiveness to others. “This loving attentiveness is the beginning of a true concern for their person which inspires me effectively to seek their good. This entails appreciating the poor in their goodness, in their experience of life, in their culture, and in their ways of living the faith. True love is always contemplative, and permits us to serve the other not out of necessity or vanity, but rather because he or she is beautiful above and beyond mere appearances... Only on the basis of this real and sincere closeness can we properly accompany the poor on their path of liberation.” [111] For this reason, I express my heartfelt gratitude to all those who have chosen to live among the poor, not merely to pay them an occasional visit but to live with them as they do. Such a decision should be deemed one of the highest forms of evangelical life.

102. In light of this, it is evident that all of us must “let ourselves be evangelized” [112] by the poor and acknowledge “the mysterious wisdom which God wishes to share with us through them.” [113] Growing up in precarious circumstances, learning to survive in the most adverse conditions, trusting in God with the assurance that no one else takes them seriously, and helping one another in the darkest moments, the poor have learned many things that they keep hidden in their hearts. Those of us who have not had similar experiences of living this way certainly have much to gain from the source of wisdom that is the experience of the poor. Only by relating our complaints to their sufferings and privations can we experience a reproof that can challenge us to simplify our lives.

CHAPTER FIVE
A CONSTANT CHALLENGE

103. I have chosen to recall the age-old history of the Church's care for the poor and with the poor in order to make clear that it has always been a central part of her life. Indeed, caring for the poor is part of the Church's great Tradition, a beacon as it were of evangelical light to illumine the hearts and guide the decisions of Christians in every age. That is why we must feel bound to invite everyone to share in the light and life born of recognizing Christ in the faces of the suffering and those in need. Love for the poor is an essential element of the history of God's dealings with us; it rises up from the heart of the Church as a constant appeal to the hearts of the faithful, both individually and in our communities. As the Body of Christ, the Church experiences the lives of the poor as her very "flesh," for theirs is a privileged place within the pilgrim people of God. Consequently, love for the poor — whatever the form their poverty may take — is the evangelical hallmark of a Church faithful to the heart of God. Indeed, one of the priorities of every movement of renewal within the Church has always been a preferential concern for the poor. In this sense, her work with the poor differs in its inspiration and method from the work carried out by any other humanitarian organization.

104. No Christian can regard the poor simply as a societal problem; they are part of our "family." They are "one of us." Nor can our relationship to the poor be reduced to merely another ecclesial activity or function. In the words of the Aparecida Document, "we are asked to devote time to the poor, to give them loving attention, to listen to them with interest, to stand by them in difficult moments, choosing to spend hours, weeks or years of our lives with them, and striving to transform their situations, starting from them. We cannot forget that this is what Jesus himself proposed in his actions and by his words." [114]

The Good Samaritan, once again

105. The dominant culture at the beginning of this millennium would have us abandon the poor to their fate and consider them unworthy of attention, much less our respect. Pope Francis, in his Encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, challenged us to reflect on the parable of the Good Samaritan (cf. *Lk* 10:25-37), which presents the different reactions of those confronted by the sight of a wounded man lying on the road. Only the Good Samaritan stops and cares for him. Pope Francis went on to ask each of us: "Which of these persons do you identify with? This question, blunt as it is, is direct and incisive. Which of these characters do you resemble? We need to acknowledge that we are constantly tempted to ignore others, especially the weak. Let us admit that, for all the progress we have made, we are still 'illiterate' when it comes to accompanying, caring

for and supporting the most frail and vulnerable members of our developed societies. We have become accustomed to looking the other way, passing by, and ignoring situations until they affect us directly." [115]

106. It is important for us to realize that the story of the Good Samaritan remains timely even today. "If I encounter a person sleeping outdoors on a cold night, I can view him or her as an annoyance, an idler, an obstacle in my path, a troubling sight, a problem for politicians to sort out, or even a piece of refuse cluttering a public space. Or I can respond with faith and charity, and see in this person a human being with a dignity identical to my own, a creature infinitely loved by the Father, an image of God, a brother or sister redeemed by Jesus Christ. That is what it is to be a Christian! Can holiness somehow be understood apart from this lively recognition of the dignity of each human being?" [116] What did the Good Samaritan do?

107. These questions become all the more urgent in light of a serious flaw present in the life of our societies, but also in our Christian communities. The many forms of indifference we see all around us are in fact "signs of an approach to life that is spreading in various and subtle ways. What is more, caught up as we are with our own needs, the sight of a person who is suffering disturbs us. It makes us uneasy, since we have no time to waste on other people's problems. These are symptoms of an unhealthy society. A society that seeks prosperity but turns its back on suffering. May we not sink to such depths! Let us look to the example of the Good Samaritan." [117] The final words of the Gospel parable — "Go and do likewise" (*Lk* 10:37) — represent a mandate that every Christian must daily take to heart.

An inescapable challenge for the Church today

108. At a particularly critical time in the history of the Church in Rome, when the imperial institutions were collapsing under the pressure of the barbarian invasions, Pope Saint Gregory the Great felt it necessary to remind the faithful: "Every minute we can find a Lazarus if we seek him, and every day, even without seeking, we find one at our door. Now beggars besiege us, imploring alms; later they will be our advocates... Therefore do not waste the opportunity of doing works of mercy; do not store unused the good things you possess." [118] Gregory courageously denounced contemporary forms of prejudice against the poor, including the belief that they were responsible for their plight: "Whenever you see the poor doing something reprehensible, do not despise or discredit them, for the fire of poverty is perhaps purifying their sinful actions, however slight they be." [119] Not infrequently, our prosperity can make us blind to the needs of others, and even make us think that our happiness and fulfillment depend on ourselves alone, apart from others. In such cases, the poor can act as silent teachers for us, making us conscious of our presumption and instilling within us a rightful spirit of humility.

109. While it is true that the rich care for the poor, the opposite is no less true. This is a remarkable fact confirmed by the entire Christian tradition. Lives can actually be turned around by the realization that the poor have much to teach us about the Gospel and its demands. By their silent witness, they make us confront the precariousness of our existence. The elderly, for example, by their physical frailty, remind us of our own fragility, even as we attempt to conceal it behind our apparent prosperity and outward appearance. The poor, too, remind us how baseless is the attitude of aggressive arrogance with which we frequently confront life's difficulties. They remind us how uncertain and empty our seemingly safe and secure lives may be. Here again, Saint Gregory the Great has much to tell us: "Let no one consider himself secure, saying, 'I do not steal from others, but simply enjoy what is rightfully mine.' The rich man was not punished because he took what belonged to others, but because, while possessing such great riches, he had become impoverished within. This was indeed the reason for his condemnation to hell: in his prosperity, he preserved no sense of justice; the wealth he had received made him proud and caused him to lose all sense of compassion." [120]

110. For us Christians, the problem of the poor leads to the very heart of our faith. Saint John Paul II taught that the preferential option for the poor, namely the Church's love for the poor, "is essential for her and a part of her constant tradition, and impels her to give attention to a world in which poverty is threatening to assume massive proportions in spite of technological and economic progress." [121] For Christians, the poor are not a sociological category, but the very "flesh" of Christ. It is not enough to profess the doctrine of God's Incarnation in general terms. To enter truly into this great mystery, we need to understand clearly that the Lord took on a flesh that hungers and thirsts, and experiences infirmity and imprisonment. "A poor Church for the poor begins by reaching out to the flesh of Christ. If we reach out to the flesh of Christ, we begin to understand something, to understand what this poverty, the Lord's poverty, actually is; and this is far from easy." [122]

111. By her very nature the Church is in solidarity with the poor, the excluded, the marginalized and all those considered the outcast of society. The poor are at the heart of the Church because "our faith in Christ, who became poor, and was always close to the poor and the outcast, is the basis of our concern for the integral development of society's most neglected members." [123] In our hearts, we encounter "the need to heed this plea, born of the liberating action of grace within each of us, and so it is not a matter of a mission reserved only to a few." [124]

112. At times, Christian movements or groups have arisen which show little or no interest in the common good of society and, in particular, the protection and advancement of its most vulnerable and disadvantaged members. Yet we must never forget that religion, especially the Christian religion, cannot be limited to the private sphere, as if believers had no business making their voice heard with regard to problems affecting civil society and issues of concern to its members. [125]

113. Indeed, "any Church community, if it thinks it can comfortably go its own way without creative concern and effective cooperation in helping the poor to live with dignity and reaching out to everyone, will also risk breaking down, however much it may talk about social issues or criticize governments. It will easily drift into a spiritual worldliness camouflaged by religious practices, unproductive meetings and empty talk." [126]

114. Nor is it a question merely of providing for welfare assistance and working to ensure social justice. Christians should also be aware of another form of inconsistency in the way they treat the poor. In reality, "the worst discrimination which the poor suffer is the lack of spiritual care... Our preferential option for the poor must mainly translate into a privileged and preferential religious care." [127] Yet, this spiritual attentiveness to the poor is called into question, even among Christians, by certain prejudices arising from the fact that we find it easier to turn a blind eye to the poor. There are those who say: "Our task is to pray and teach sound doctrine." Separating this religious aspect from integral development, they even say that it is the government's job to care for them, or that it would be better not to lift them out of their poverty but simply to teach them to work. At times, pseudo-scientific data are invoked to support the claim that a free market economy will automatically solve the problem of poverty. Or even that we should opt for pastoral work with the so-called elite, since, rather than wasting time on the poor, it would be better to care for the rich, the influential and professionals, so that with their help real solutions can be found and the Church can feel protected. It is easy to perceive the worldliness behind these positions, which would lead us to view reality through superficial lenses, lacking any light from above, and to cultivate relationships that bring us security and a position of privilege.

Almsgiving today

115. I would like to close by saying something about almsgiving, which nowadays is not looked upon favorably even among believers. Not only is it rarely practiced, but it is even at times disparaged. Let me state once again that the most important way to help the disadvantaged is to assist them in finding a good job, so that they can lead a more dignified life by developing their abilities and contributing their fair share. In this sense, "lack of work means far more than simply not

having a steady source of income. Work is also this, but it is much, much more. By working we become a fuller person, our humanity flourishes, young people become adults only by working. The Church's social doctrine has always seen human work as a participation in God's work of creation that continues every day, also thanks to the hands, mind and heart of the workers." [128] On the other hand, where this is not possible, we cannot risk abandoning others to the fate of lacking the necessities for a dignified life. Consequently, almsgiving remains, for the time being, a necessary means of contact, encounter and empathy with those less fortunate.

116. Those inspired by true charity know full well that almsgiving does not absolve the competent authorities of their responsibilities, eliminate the duty of government institutions to care for the poor, or detract from rightful efforts to ensure justice. Almsgiving at least offers us a chance to halt before the poor, to look into their eyes, to touch them and to share something of ourselves with them. In any event, almsgiving, however modest, brings a touch of *pietas* into a society otherwise marked by the frenetic pursuit of personal gain. In the words of the Book of Proverbs: "Those who are generous are blessed, for they share their bread with the poor" (22:9).

117. Both the Old and New Testaments contain veritable hymns in praise of almsgiving: "Be patient with someone in humble circumstances, and do not keep him waiting for your alms... Store up almsgiving in your treasury, and it will rescue you from every disaster" (*Sir* 29:8,12). Jesus himself adds: "Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys" (*Lk* 12:33).

118. Saint John Chrysostom is known for saying: "Almsgiving is the wing of prayer. If you do not provide your prayer with wings, it will hardly fly." [129] In the same vein, Saint Gregory of Nazianzus concluded one of his celebrated orations with these words: "If you think that I have something to say, servants of Christ, his brethren and co-heirs, let us visit Christ whenever we may; let us care for him, feed him, clothe him, welcome him, honor him, not only at a meal, as some have done, or by anointing him, as Mary did, or only by lending him a tomb, like Joseph of Arimathea, or by arranging for his burial, like Nicodemus, who loved Christ half-heartedly, or by giving him gold, frankincense and myrrh, like the Magi before all these others. The Lord of all asks for mercy, not sacrifice... Let us then show him mercy in the persons of the poor and those who today are lying on the ground, so that when we come to leave this world they may receive us into everlasting dwelling places." [130]

119. Our love and our deepest convictions need to be continually cultivated, and we do so through our concrete actions. Remaining in the realm of ideas and theories, while failing to give them expression through frequent and practical acts of charity, will eventually cause even our most cherished hopes and aspirations to weaken and fade away. For this very reason, we Christians must not abandon almsgiving. It can be done in different ways, and surely more effectively, but it must continue to be done. It is always better at least to do something rather than nothing. Whatever form it may take, almsgiving will touch and soften our hardened hearts. It will not solve the problem of world poverty, yet it must still be carried out, with intelligence, diligence and social responsibility. For our part, we need to give alms as a way of reaching out and touching the suffering flesh of the poor.

120. Christian love breaks down every barrier, brings close those who were distant, unites strangers, and reconciles enemies. It spans chasms that are humanly impossible to bridge, and it penetrates to the most hidden crevices of society. By its very nature, Christian love is prophetic: it works miracles and knows no limits. It makes what was apparently impossible happen. Love is above all a way of looking at life and a way of living it. A Church that sets no limits to love, that knows no enemies to fight but only men and women to love, is the Church that the world needs today.

121. Through your work, your efforts to change unjust social structures or your simple, heartfelt gesture of closeness and support, the poor will come to realize that Jesus' words are addressed personally to each of them: "I have loved you" (*Rev* 3:9).

Given in Rome, at Saint Peter's, on 4 October, the Memorial of Saint Francis of Assisi, in the year 2025, the first of my Pontificate.

LEO PP. XIV

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[1] Francis, Encyclical Letter *Dilexit Nos* (24 October 2024), 170: *AAS* 116 (2024), 1422.

[2] Ibid ., 171: *AAS* 116 (2024), 1422-1423.

[3] Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate* (19 March 2018), 96: *AAS* 110 (2018), 1137.

[4] Francis, *Audience with Representatives of the Communications Media* (16 March 2013): *AAS* 105 (2013), 381.

[5] J. Bergoglio - A. Skorka , *Sobre el cielo y la tierra,* Buenos Aires 2013, 214.

[6] Paul VI, *Homily at the Mass for the Last Public Session of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council* (7 December 1965): *AAS* 58 (1966), 55-56.

[7] Cf. Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), 187: *AAS* 105 (2013), 1098.

[8] Ibid., 212: *AAS* 105 (2013), 1108.

[9] Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti* (3 October 2020), 23: *AAS* 112 (2020), 977.

[10] Ibid., 21: *AAS* 112 (2020), 976.

[11] Council of the European Communities , *Decision (85/8/EEC) on Specific Community Action to Combat Poverty* (19 December 1984), Art. 1(2): *Official Journal of the European Communities*, No. L 2/24.

[12] Cf. John Paul II, *Catechesis* (27 October 1999): *L'Osservatore Romano*, 28 October 1999, 4.

[13] Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), 197: *AAS* 105 (2013), 1102.

[14] Cf. Francis, *Message for the 5th World Day of the Poor* (13 June 2021), 3: *AAS* 113 (2021), 691: "Jesus not only sides with the poor; he also *shares their lot*. This is a powerful lesson for his disciples in every age."

[15] Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), 186: *AAS* 105 (2013), 1098.

[16] Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate* (19 March 2018), 95: *AAS* 110 (2018), 1137.

[17] Ibid ., 97: *AAS* 110 (2018), 1137.

[18] Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), 194: *AAS* 105 (2013), 1101.

[19] Francis, *Audience with Representatives of the Communications Media* (16 March 2013): *AAS* 105 (2013), 381.

[20] Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 8.

[21] Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), 48: *AAS* 105 (2013), 1040.

[22] In this chapter, some of these witnesses are being put forward. This is not being done in an exhaustive manner but rather to demonstrate that care for the poor has always characterized the presence of the Church in the world. A more in-depth reflection on the attention given to those most in need can be found in the following book: V. Paglia, *Storia della povertà*, Milan 2014.

[23] Cf. Ambrose, *De officiis ministrorum* I, cap. 41, 205-206: *CCSL* 15, Turnhout 2000, 76-77; II, cap. 28, 140-143: *CCSL* 15, 148-149.

[24] Ibid., II, cap. 28, 140: *CCSL* 15, 148.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid., II, cap. 28, 142: *CCSL* 15, 148.

[27] Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistula ad Smyrnaeos*, 6, 2: *SC* 10bis, Paris 2007, 136-138.

[28] Polycarp, *Epistula ad Philippenses*, 6, 1: *SC* 10bis, 186.

[29] Justin, *Apologia prima*, 67, 6-7: *SC* 507, Paris 2006, 310.

[30] John Chrysostom, *Homiliae in Matthaeum*, 50, 3: *PG* 58, Paris 1862, 508.

[31] Ibid. 50, 4: PG 58, 509.

[32] John Chrysostom, *Homilia in Epistula ad Hebraeos*, 11, 3 *: PG* 63, Paris 1862, 94.

[33] John Chrysostom, *Homilia II De Lazaro*, 6: *PG* 48, Paris 1862, 992.

[34] Ambrose, *De Nabuthae*, 12, 53: *CSEL* 32/2, Prague-Vienna-Leipzig 1897, 498.

[35] Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, 125, 12: *CSEL* 95/3, Vienna 2001, 181.

[36] Augustine, *Sermo LXXXVI*, 5: *CCSL* 41Ab, Turnhout 2019, 411-412.

[37] Pseudo-Augustine, *Sermo CCCLXXXVIII*, 2: *PL* 39, Paris 1862, 1700.

[38] Cyprian, *De mortalitate*, 16: *CCSL* 3A, Turnhout 1976, 25.

[39] Francis, *Message for the 30th World Day of the Sick* (10 December 2021), 3: *AAS* 114 (2022), 51.

[40] Camillus de Lellis, *Rule of the Order of Ministers of the Sick*, 27: M. Vanti (ed.), *Scritti di San Camillo de Lellis*, Milan 1965, 67.

[41] Louise de Marillac, *Letter to Sisters Claudia Carré and Maria Gaudoin* (28 November 1657): E. Charpy (ed.), *Sainte Louise de Marillac. Écrits*, Paris 1983, 576.

[42] Basil the Great, *Regulae fusius tractatae*, 37, 1: *PG* 31, Paris 1857, 1009 C-D.

[43] *Regula Benedicti*, 53, 15: *SC* 182, Paris 1972, 614.

[44] John Cassian, *Collationes*, XIV, 10: *CSEL* 13, Vienna 2004, 410.

[45] Benedict XVI, *Catechesis* (21 October 2009): *L'Osservatore Romano*, 22 October 2009, 1.

[46] Cf. Innocent III, Bull *Operante divinae dispositionis – Primitive Rule of the Trinitarians* (17 December 1198), 2: J.L. Aurrecoechea – A. Moldón (eds.), *Fuentes históricas de la Orden Trinitaria* (s. *XII-XV)*, Córdoba 2003, 6: "All things, from whatever lawful source they may come, the brothers are to divide them into three equal parts. Insofar as two parts will be sufficient, the works of mercy are to be performed from them, as well as providing for a moderate sustenance for themselves and their necessary household members. The third part is to be reserved for the ransom of captives who are incarcerated for the faith of Christ."

[47] Cf. *Constitutions of the Mercedarian Order*, n. 14: Orden de la Bienaventurada Virgen María de la Merced, *Regla y Constituciones,* Rome 2014, 53: "To fulfill this mission, driven by charity, we consecrate ourselves to God with a special vow, called Redemption, by virtue of which we promise to give our lives, if necessary, as Christ gave his for us, to save Christians who are in extreme danger of losing their faith in new forms of slavery."

[48] Cf. Saint John Baptist of the Conception, *La regla de la Orden de la Santísima Trinidad*, XX, 1: *BAC Maior* 60, Madrid, 1999, 90: "In this, the poor and prisoners are like Christ, on whom the sufferings of the world are laid... This holy Order of the Most Holy Trinity summons them and invites them to come and drink the water of the Savior, which means that, if Christ hanging on the cross was redemption and salvation for men, the Order has taken this redemption and wants to distribute it to the poor and save and free the prisoners."

[49] Cf. Saint John Baptist of the Conception, *El recogimiento interior*, XL, 4: *BAC Maior* 48, Madrid 1995, 689: "Free will makes man free and master among all creatures, but, God help me, how many are those who, by this way, become slaves and prisoners of the devil, imprisoned and chained by their passions and lusts."

[50] Francis, *Message for the 48th World Day of Peace* (8 December 2014), 3: *AAS* 107 (2015), 69.

[51] Francis, *Meeting with Police Prison Officers, Detainees, and Volunteers* (Verona, May 18 May 2024): *AAS* 116 (2024), 766.

[52] Honorius III, Bull *Solet annuere – Regula bullata* (29 November 1223), chap. VI: *SC* 285, Paris 1981, 192.

[53] Cf. Gregory IX, Bull *Sicut manifestum est* (17 September 1228), 7: *SC* 325, Paris 1985, 200: "Sicut igitur supplicastis, altissimae paupertatis propositum vestrum favore apostolico roboramus, auctoritate vobis praesentium indulgentes, ut recipere possessiones a nullo compelli possitis."

[54] Cf. S.C. Tugwell, (ed.), *Early Dominicans. Selected Writings*, Mahwah 1982, 16-19.

[55] Thomas of Celano, *Vita Seconda*, *pars prima*, cap. IV, 8: *AnalFranc*, 10, Florence 1941, 135.

[56] Francis, *Address following the visit to the tomb of Don Lorenzo Milani*, (Barbiana, 20 June 2017), 2: *AAS* 109 (2017), 745.

[57] John Paul II, *Address to the Participants in the General Chapter of the Poor Clerics Regular of the Mother of God of the Pious Schools* (*Piarists*) (5 July 1997), 2: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 6 July 1997, 5.

[58] Ibid.

[59] John Paul II, *Homily for the Mass of Canonization* (18 April 1999): *AAS* 91 (1999), 930.

[60] Cf. John Paul II, Letter *Iuvenum Patris* (31 January 1988), 9: *AAS* 80 (1988), 976.

[61] Cf. Francis, *Address to the Participants in the General Chapter of the Institute of Charity (Rosminians)* (1 October 2018): *L'Osservatore Romano*, 1-2 October 2018, 7.

[62] Francis, *Homily for the Mass of Canonization* (9 October 2022): *AAS* 114 (2022), 1338.

[63] John Paul II, *Message to the Congregation of the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart* (31 May 2000), 3: *L'Osservatore Romano,* 16 July 2000, 5.

[64] Cf. Pius XII, Papal Brief *Superior Iam Aetate* (8 September 1950): *AAS* 43 (1951), 455-456.

[65] Francis, *Message for the 105th World Day of Migrants and Refugees* (27 May 2019): *AAS* 111 (2019), 911.

[66] Francis, *Message for the 100th World Day of Migrants and Refugees* (5 August 2013): *AAS* 105 (2013), 930.

[67] Teresa of Calcutta, *Speech on the occasion of the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize* (Oslo, 10 December 1979): *Aimer jusqu'à en avoir mal*, Lyon 2017, 19-20.

[68] John Paul II, *Address to the Pilgrims who had come to Rome for the Beatification of Mother Teresa* (20 October 2003), 3: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 20-21 October 2003, 10.

[69] Francis, *Homily for the Mass and Canonization* (13 October 2019): *AAS* 111 (2019), 1712.

[70] John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (6 January 2001), 49: *AAS* 93 (2001), 302.

[71] Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Christus Vivit* (25 March 2019), 231: *AAS* 111 (2019), 458.

[72] Francis, *Address to Participants in the World Meeting of Popular Movements* (28 October 2014): *AAS* 106 (2014), 851-852.

[73] Ibid .: *AAS* 106 (2014), 859.

[74] Francis, *Address to Participants in the World Meeting of Popular Movements* (November 5, 2016): *L'Osservatore Romano*, 7-8 November, 2016, 5.

[75] Ibid.

[76] John XXIII, *Radio Message to all the Christian faithful one month before the opening of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council* (11 September 1962): *AAS* 54 (1962), 682.

[77] G. LERCARO, *Intervention in the XXXV General Congregation of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council* (6 December 1962), 2: *AS* I/IV, 327-328.

[78] Ibid., 4: *AS* I/IV, 329.

[79] Institute for Religious Sciences (ed.), *Per la forza dello Spirito. Discorsi conciliari del Card. Giacomo Lercaro*, Bologna 1984, 115.

[80] Paul VI, *Address for the Solemn Inauguration of the Second Session of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council* (29 September 1963): *AAS* 55 (1963) 857.

[81] Paul VI, *Catechesis* (11 November 1964): *Insegnamenti di Paolo VI*, II (1964), 984.

[82] Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 69, 71.

[83] Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio* (26 March 1967), 23: *AAS* 59 (1967), 269.

[84] Cf. ibid., 4: *AAS* 59 (1967), 259.

[85] John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (30 December 1987), 42: *AAS* 80 (1988), 572.

[86] Ibid., *AAS* 80 (1988), 573.

[87] John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Laborem Exercens* (14 September 1981), 3: *AAS* 73 (1981), 584.

[88] Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate* (29 June 2009), 7: *AAS* 101 (2009), 645.

[89] Ibid., 27: *AAS* 101 (2009), 661.

[90] Second General Conference of the Latin American Bishops, *Medellín Document* (24 October 1968), 14, n. 7: Celam, *Medellín. Conclusiones*, Lima 2005, 131-132.

[91] Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), 202: *AAS* 105 (2013), 1105.

[92] Ibid., 205: *AAS* 105 (2013), 1106.

[93] Ibid., 190: *AAS* 105 (2013), 1099.

[94] Ibid., 56: *AAS* 105 (2013), 1043.

[95] Francis, Encyclical Letter *Dilexit Nos* (24 October 2024), 183: *AAS* 116 (2024), 1427.

[96] John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus* (1 May 1991), 41: *AAS* 83 (1991), 844-845.

[97] Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), 202: *AAS* 105 (2013), 1105.

[98] Ibid.

[99] Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti* (3 October 2020), 22: *AAS* 112 (2020), 976.

[100] Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), 209: *AAS* 105 (2013), 1107.

[101] Francis, Encyclical Letter Laudato Si' (24 May 2015), 50: *AAS* 107 (2015), 866.

[102] Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), 210: *AAS* 105 (2013), 1107.

[103] Francis, Encyclical Letter Laudato Si' (24 May 2015), 43: *AAS* 107 (2015), 863.

[104] Ibid., 48: *AAS* 107 (2015), 865.

[105] Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), 180: *AAS* 105 (2013), 1095.

[106] Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction on Certain Aspects of the "Theology of Liberation" (6 August 1984) XI, 18: *AAS* 76 (1984), 907-908.

[107] Fifth General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops, *Aparecida Document*, (29 June 2007), n. 392, Bogotá 2007, pp. 179-180. Cf. Benedict XVI, *Address at the Inaugural Session of the Fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean* (13 May 2007), 3: *AAS* 99 (2007), 450.

[108] Cf. Fifth General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops, *Aparecida Document* (29 June 2007), nn. 43-87, pp. 31-47.

[109] Fifth General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops, *Final Message* (29 May 2007), n. 4, Bogotá 2007, p. 275.

[110] Fifth General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops, *Aparecida Document* (29 June 2007), n. 398, p. 182.

[111] Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), 199: *AAS* 105 (2013), 1103-1104.

[112] Ibid., 198: *AAS* 105 (2013), 1103.

[113] Ibid.

[114] Fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean, *Aparecida Document* (29 June 2007), n. 397, p. 182.

[115] Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti* (3 October 2020), 64: *AAS* 112 (2020), 992.

[116] Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate* (19 March 2018), 98: *AAS* 110 (2018), 1137.

[117] Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti* (3 October 2020), 65-66: *AAS* 112 (2020), 992.

[118] Gregory the Great, *Homilia* 40, 10: *SC* 522, Paris 2008, 552-554.

[119] Ibid ., 6: *SC* 522, 546.

[120] Ibid ., 3: *SC* 522, 536.

[121] John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus* (1 May 1991), 57: *AAS* 83 (1991), 862-863.

[122] Francis, *Vigil of Pentecost with the Ecclesial Movements* (18 May 2013): *L'Osservatore Romano* 20-21 May 2013, 5.

[123] Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), 186: *AAS* 105 (2013), 1098.

[124] Ibid., 188: *AAS* 105 (2013), 1099.

[125] Cf. ibid., 182-183: *AAS* 105 (2013), 1096-1097.

[126] Ibid., 207: *AAS* 105 (2013), 1107.

[127] Ibid., 200: *AAS* 105 (2013), 1104.

[128] Francis, *Address at the Meeting with Representatives of the World of Labor at the Ilva Factory in Genoa* (27 May 2017): *AAS* 109 (2017), 613.

[129] Pseudo-Chrysostom, *Homilia de Jejunio et Eleemosyna: PG* 48, 1060.

[130] Gregory Nazianzus, *Oratio* XIV, 40: *PG* 35, Paris 1886, 910.

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