



E-BULLETIN #161

01-Mar-15

"Let the holiness of God shine forth" (cf. Mt 5, 16)

item 307

"make our hearts like Yours"

In his 2015 Lenten message Pope Francis calls the faithful to be wary of indifference and asks us to do away with it:

"Indifference to our neighbour, and to God also, represents a real temptation for us Christians. Each year during Lent we need to hear once more the voice of the prophets who cry out and trouble our conscience. God is not indifferent to our world."

Deeds, however ordinary they may seem, make a difference to the lives of people when done with lots of love. I encountered a concrete example this Ash Wednesday.



Community of
SANT'EGIDIO

As a student priest in Rome my weekends are normally free, so in my spare time I assist in the pastoral needs of the **Community of Sant'Egidio** on the periphery of Rome. That normally involves Masses for the elderly, handicapped, abandoned, immigrants etc.

On Monday before the start of Lent someone from the Community called and asked if I could celebrate an Ash Wednesday service at an aged care home, to which I readily agreed. The night before the celebration they called again and said that a simple ceremony of the imposition of ashes would be enough as there would be no opportunity to celebrate Mass. I was a bit perturbed, but still agreed.

Then the day came and at 2.30 pm Roberto drove me to the place in his car. On the way he said, 'Father I want to tell you some facts about where we are going. It is a privately owned home for the elderly and has about 80 residents (almost all Catholic). It is the first ever time some religious ceremony is going to take place there. The owners of the institution are non-Catholic so that complicates the matter a little'. He said he often felt sad that the elderly died there without receiving the last sacraments. The owners did not care and their hostile attitude didn't encourage the parish priest either (I later I discovered that the parish church stood barely 100m



away!).

Over a period of the last 12 months a few people from the Community had befriended the owners and elderly inmates, and had commenced regular visits. They had won over the elderly and – maybe not fully! – the owners. The enthusiasm of the members of Sant’Egidio, like Roberto, Michele, Chiara and others, made a deep impression in their lives. Roberto told me the first thing they did was to learn the Christian names of the residents. It was a first, because the nurses always addressed them with their surnames and often didn’t even know their first name. He said that now the nurses also have slowly taken the cue and started learning the first names.

When we arrived I found many in wheel chairs, huddled into the only small space available. There was no proper hall or chapel. Their faces lit up with joy, as it was unimaginable to have a religious ceremony in that facility. Because only 20-25 could gather at once we had just a brief ceremony, then went from room to room distributing ashes and saying a small prayer with each one. Many were really over the moon and some of them asked my friends from Sant’Egidio: ‘Why are you in a hurry today? I want to talk.’ It showed the huge difference they had made in the lives of those people through their loving words and patient listening, something the caregivers had failed to do.

As Pope Francis says, so often we take our existence for granted when we are healthy and able, and so a cultivated indifference can creep into all aspects of our life, be it spiritual or material.

“Usually, when we are healthy and comfortable, we forget about others (something God the Father never does): we are unconcerned with their problems, their sufferings and the injustices they endure... Our heart grows cold. As long as I am relatively healthy and comfortable, I don't think about those less well off. Today this selfish attitude of indifference has taken on global proportions, to the extent that we can speak of a globalization of indifference. It is a problem which we, as Christians, need to confront.”

When I was confronted with those residents on this Ash Wednesday I found it was true in my case too! As we were leaving we promised to be back soon. My encounter, with both the elderly and my friends from Sant’Egidio, began a process in me of melting my own indifference too.

I will finish this sharing with another quote from Pope Francis in which he proposes ways to fight our indifference during this Lent:



“As a way of overcoming indifference and our pretensions to self-sufficiency, I would invite everyone to live this Lent as an opportunity for engaging in what Benedict XVI called a formation of the heart. A merciful heart does not mean a weak heart. Anyone who wishes to be merciful must have a strong and steadfast heart, closed to the tempter but open to God. A heart which lets itself be pierced by the Spirit so as to bring love along the roads that lead to our brothers and sisters. And, ultimately, a poor heart, one which realizes its own poverty and gives itself freely for others. During this Lent, then,

brothers and sisters, let us all ask the Lord: *“Make our hearts like Yours”* (ref. the Litany of the Sacred Heart of Jesus). In this way we will receive a heart which is firm and merciful, attentive and generous, a heart which is not closed, indifferent or prey to the globalization of indifference.”

Wishing you all a fruitful Lenten season. May the Lord melt our indifference away!

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item 308

another view on this Year....

Consecrated life, as a call from God, is a call to commit oneself to follow Christ wholeheartedly – a call to leave everything in order to be with Christ. It demands that one commits fully to the service of God, but not forgetting one’s sisters and brothers.



Many consecrated men and women, through their different charisms of spiritual and apostolic life, and through practicing the evangelical counsels, do their best to be in communion with Christ. That communion should be profound in order to share that same Christ with others. When I become active in my own apostolate with youth at St Francis of Assisi, Gatina – an outstation of Sacred Heart Parish, Dagoretti Corner, **Nairobi** – I have to share the same Christ I have received with them. The Christ I have to offer is the Christ I receive in the Eucharist and the same Christ who reveals himself in the word. This is because the Eucharist is the centre of the whole of the Church’s life, and of my life.

Communion with Christ in this year of consecrated life calls for me to retreat, to meditate about my life in relation to my apostolate and my vocation as a whole. In the sacrament of reconciliation I encounter God’s mercy enabling me to renew and purify my heart when I acknowledge my wrong doings. In spiritual direction I have to be truthful to the word of God.

Let us focus on perseverance. Perseverance is one of the promises we make in our Society. It calls for faithfulness. Faithfulness is possible only if one follows Christ, and learns to love as He did. That love is constant and endless, unlike ours which is full of human weakness and lacks constancy. It is in fact His loving us that keeps us faithful, that maintains the relationship between Himself and us.

God’s love for us is what upholds us, helps us to endure, especially in times when sorrows inevitably come our way. By clinging to Him and persevering we offer an example to others – an offering that often comes back. It is ultimately an expression of that mutual love which, in a community of consecrated people, should be the whole centre of life.

Today the world is also looking for conversion, but often not as Christ intended it. He underwent suffering for the conversion of humanity, but that doesn’t seem to be the vision of the human race that He loves so much. People today seem to want to control life with a switch, as did our first parents who wanted to convert their lives and be like God. Today’s focus is on issues such as cloning, abortion, in vitro fertilization – signs that humanity wants to be in control of the whole world as though it is its own creator.



Hekima College

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St Vincent emphasizes that we must be seriously focused on God alone – ‘not food and drink, not clothing, not worldly goods... but God, God in all and forever’.



He calls upon the entire baptized community not to be taken in by materialism but to remain focused on God. That emphasis, and the support we receive from Him in turn, will remind us of our own call, to be stable and loyal and to persevere.

With the Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen of the Apostles, I pray that this meditation about my life as a consecrated person may bear fruit through our Lord Jesus Christ.

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you commented...

on #160

From Mysore to Barbados! Another fascinating bulletin about a Pallottine world that is much bigger than I ever knew (or, perhaps more correctly, understood)!

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