



Letter to the People of God

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“I was a stranger and you welcomed me” (Mt 25:35)

Saint Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians talks about the celebration of the Eucharist, the Mass, and the meal of the Brethren called “Agape”. They would meet in a home to partake of a meal and at the same time they used to celebrate the Eucharist. Frequently the rich brothers would take their meal apart ignoring the poor. Saint Paul drew their attention to the fact that to be one with the body of Christ in Communion they needed to be one with each other by partaking from the same food. Saint Paul was hard in his words telling them, “Or do you look down on God’s churches and humiliate those who have nothing?” In other words, the celebration of the Eucharist lost all its meaning and efficacy when the poor were ignored and humiliated (cfr. *1 Cor* 11:17-34).

Saint John Chrysostom, one of the Fathers of the Church who lived in the fourth century, when commenting this passage from the first letter to the Corinthians writes: “The Church is not the place where we stay apart (as for example according to race), but that which sets us apart disappears because we have come together” (PG, 61, 227). It is better that we do not celebrate the Eucharist if we conceal in our heart hatred for those who are different or worse still we judge them as inferior to us. We cannot take part in the Eucharist to open our hearts to Christ and at the same time close them to suffering people.

The Bible is replete with the love of God for the poor and forsaken of the earth. Jesus reminds us, “You always have the poor with you” (*Mt* 26:11). He says this so that the disciples will take care of them and move to tend to their wounds (cfr. *Lk* 10:25-37).

Amongst the poor of our times we have so many migrants who for some reason or other leave their country looking for a better future. Frequently but especially in the summer months we witness heart rending episodes of persons, families and even babies losing their life in the Mediterranean. Witnessing this continuous tragedy Pope Francis has

gone so far as to call the clear seas surrounding our islands as the “cemetery of the Mediterranean” (17th September 2016).

One understands that there are no easy solutions for this huge emergency taking place around us. But moved by the Word of God and the example of our Lord Jesus Christ who “although he was rich, he became poor for our sakes” (2 Cor 8:9), I feel that as a believing community we cannot remain silent and indifferent faced with this unfolding tragedy effecting our country and the European Union.

It is in this light that last Sunday, on the occasion of the Feast of Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Kerċem, I appealed to our parish congregations to offer the money collected on their respective feast days to be devolved to the *Jesuit Refugee Service* of our country. Even if our gestures are just a drop in an ocean we would be participating in the work of this charitable organisation run by the Jesuits in favour of these poor of our times. In this way, while we are celebrating solemn liturgies and rejoicing together on the occasion of the feast of our patron saints, we would be “crying with those who are crying” (Rom 12:15) and giving a deeper sense to our Eucharistic celebrations and our feasts.

I know that our people are generous people and know how to answer to the needs of others. I am therefore renewing my appeal so that from the little we have we can share with those who are in need.

Given from the Bishop’s Curia, today, Thursday 11 July 2018, feast of Saint Benedict, Abbot and Patron Saint of Europe.

✠ **Mario Grech**
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