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“Pope Francis and the Missionary Transformation of the Church and the Diaconate”
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Pope Francis and the Missionary Transformation of the Church through Charity

- Introduction
 - When Pope Francis celebrated his Mass of the Inauguration of the Papacy on the Solemnity of St. Joseph, he spoke during the homily about how St. Joseph encountered Jesus and fulfilled the vocation he had as a *Redemptoris Custos*, as the protector of the Redeemer and of his blessed Mother. Pope Francis said he is the model of all of those who “are sensitive to the persons entrusted to his safekeeping.” He told us that St. Joseph is a “strong and courageous man, a working man, yet in his heart we see great tenderness, which is not the virtue of the weak but rather a sign of strength of spirit and a capacity for concern, for compassion, for genuine openness to others, for love.” Pope Francis said that St. Joseph’s tenderness, his concern for those in need, is a model not only for the Papal Ministry but for all Christians. “Let us never forget,” Pope Francis stressed, “that authentic power is service, and that the Pope, too, when exercising power, must enter ever more fully into that service which has its radiant culmination on the Cross. He must be inspired by the lowly, concrete and faithful service that marked Saint Joseph and, like him, he must open his arms to protect all of God’s people and embrace with tender affection the whole of humanity, especially the poorest, the weakest, the least important, those whom Matthew lists in the final judgment on love: the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick and those in prison (cf. Mt 25:31-46). Only those who serve with love are able to protect!” That is something that obviously he has been trying to accomplish. But it’s also a challenge that he has been making to all of us, to care for others the way that St. Joseph cared for Jesus and the Blessed Virgin Mary.
 - The fundamental reform of the Church, according to Pope Francis, is to allow the Lord once again to “re-shape” us into missionary disciples in communion, into an evangelized and an evangelizing Church. The Church doesn’t have a mission, but *is* a mission. Similarly each of us needs to be able to say with him, “I am a mission.” We’re called not just to encounter Christ and keep him to ourselves hiding under a bushel basket, but encounter Christ and keep that dynamic encounter alive as we go with him to announce the Gospel to the peripheries, not just in terms of geography but those who are left on the margins of existence. It means preaching the Gospel with words and witness, with lips and love, to the poor, to the unwanted, to the discarded, and abandoned. It means not inviting those who can repay us, but the “poor, crippled, lame and blind” who cannot repay us (Lk 14:13).
 - The fundamental corruption of the Church, he has been saying since before his election, is when the Church gets so focused on herself, on those who are already coming, on those who are already contributing, that we forget about others. We care for the sheep in the fold, but don’t care adequately at all for those people who are suffering enormously. We encounter only those who come rather than go out to meet those who can’t or don’t come.
 - In this summons, as in everything, Pope Francis is trying to lead not principally by words, but by his body language. He hasn’t just been teaching us the faith, but showing the faith. He himself has been going to the peripheries to encounter Christ in those in need:
 - He’s gone to refugee centers where those who are treated and even called “aliens” as if they were from another planet, are often subjected to terrible conditions.
 - He’s gone to jail, to care for incarcerated teens in whom no one has much hope for reform.
 - He’s gone to children’s hospitals, to care for those who are sufferings.
 - He’s gone to clinics that treat addicts and other outcasts.
 - He’s gone to poor villages and even poor homes in order to bring hope to the poor.
 - He’s changed the papal almoner’s office to go out actively and find the poor and help them in concrete ways.

- He's gone out into the crowd not in search of the royalty or celebrities, but for those who the world not only considers nobodies but burdens. He's embraced handicapped adults and kids. He's allowed a Down's teen to ride in the pope mobile with him.
- In one of the most iconic scenes of his papacy, he embraced even those whom charitable people would find physically revolting.
 - Story of Vinicio Riva with neurofibromatotic tumors This man, 53, is from the Italian town of Vicenza and he's suffered a lifetime of hurt and misunderstanding because of his being covered from head to toe with growths, swellings and itchy sores that bleed into his clothes each day.
 - In early November, he traveled with his aunt and others from Vicenza to the Vatican. He was in a wheelchair and the Swiss guard kept ushering him forward.
 - His Aunt, Caterina Lotto, said, "When we came close to us, I thought he would give me his hand. Instead he went straight to Vinicio and embraced him tightly. I thought he wouldn't give him back to me he held him so tightly. We didn't speak. We said nothing but he looked at me as if he was digging deep inside, a beautiful look that I would never have expected."
 - Vinicio said, "He didn't have any fear of my illness. ... I'm not contagious, but [the pope] didn't know that. But he did it, period. He caressed my whole face and while he was doing it, I felt only love. ... It lasted a little longer than a minute, but it felt as if it were eternity. ... I quivered. I felt great warmth." It brought about a great change in him. "I feel stronger and happier. I feel I can move ahead because the Lord is protecting me."
- When he hasn't been able to get out himself because of his papal duties, he has used his phone still to reach those and encounter Christ in those are in need, to bring Christ to those who are on the fringes..
 - On August 7, he called Michele Ferri, who had written him for prayers because he was finding it impossible to forgive the two men who had murdered his brother Andrea in Pesaro, Italy. Pope Francis called him, told him he cried reading his letter, comforted him about the death of his brother, encouraged him to forgive, and then asked to speak to his mother to extend to her his deepest sympathies.
 - On August 18, he phoned Stefano Cabizza, a 19-year old computer engineer from Padua worried about finding a job after graduation. He had passed a note to a Cardinal at the Pope's Mass on the Solemnity of the Assumption. The Pope called three times before reaching Stefano. In an eight minute conversation full of laughter, he filled Stefano with hope, encouraging him to refer to him in the informal "tu" as friends are accustomed to address each other.
 - On August 25, he phoned Alejandra Pereyra, a 44-year-old Argentinian mother of six who had written him describing that she had been raped by a police officer at gunpoint in his cruiser, but that the police department is covering up the rape and actually promoted the officer in question. Pope Francis spent a half-hour with her patiently listening to her story. He encouraged her to be calm and reminded her that she was not alone. She said the encounter gave her back her faith, her confidence and the courage to continue seeking justice.
 - He said in an interview on March 5 that he calls an 80-year-old widow who has just lost her Son once a month, to see how she's doing. He said in doing so he feels like a priest, caring for his parishioners.
 - On Nov 1, he called a fierce critic of his liturgical practices, Mario Palmaro, thanked him for his criticism and told him he was praying for him as he battled with a terminal diagnosis of cancer.. Palmaro said, ""I was astonished, amazed, above all moved: for me, as a Catholic, that which I was experiencing was one of the most beautiful experiences in my life." When the writer tried to clarify the motivations for his recent work, the pope cut him off. The Pope almost did not let me finish the

sentence,” Mr. Palmaro. The pontiff said “that he had understood that those criticisms had been made with love, and how important it had been for him to receive them.

- Perhaps the most moving of all happened September 3. Pope Francis called Anna Romano, a 35-year old Roman whose boyfriend, after she told him she was pregnant, divulged he was married and tried to persuade her to have an abortion. She wrote in anguish to the Pope asking for prayers. He called, spoke to her as friend, mentioned how “strong and brave” she was, and as she told an Italian newspaper, “reassured me, telling me that the baby was a gift from God, a sign of Providence. He told me I would not be left alone.” After she said she was worried that because she’s a divorcée her baby might not be able to be baptized, Pope Francis told her he was sure she would be surely find a willing pastor, “but if not, you know there’s always me!”
 - Pope Francis has been calling the entire world to concrete acts of charity for those in need since the beginning of his Pontificate. He’s not doing this as a conventional liberal or conservative, to use the political categories that never really fit anyone in the Church. He’s not pushing, like liberals often do, for the government to find a solution to everything. He’s, rather, telling us that we have to give the hungry multitudes something to eat. And he’s also not saying that it has to happen all by private charity, as conservatives are wont to say. Rather, he says, it’s a thing of justice and that individual handouts are never going to suffice. We need to address many of the systemic issues that cause so many individuals to fall through the cracks.
 - To many, especially in affluent areas of the west, while his example is inspiring, his words are really challenging. He is truly seeking to get us to love our neighbor in deeds, rather than just talk about loving our neighbor, whether in legislatures or Churches. He’s calling us to transcend discussion and just to put good intentions into action and body language.
 - What I’d like to do in this conference is tackle how he’s seeking to reform the whole Church and all of us in the Church to make our love for neighbor, our care for Christ in the distressing disguise of the needy more practical. Pope Francis is convinced that this is essential for the reform of the Church and for the fulfillment of the mission that is the Church.
- Pope Francis has stressed that structural reform of the Church comes after a change in attitude to make the whole Church a Good Samaritan rather than bureaucrats.
 - (Spadaro interview, Sept 19) How are we treating the people of God? I dream of a church that is a mother and shepherdess. The church’s ministers must be merciful, take responsibility for the people and accompany them like the good Samaritan, who washes, cleans and raises up his neighbor. This is pure Gospel. God is greater than sin. The structural and organizational reforms are secondary — that is, they come afterward. **The first reform must be the attitude.** The ministers of the Gospel must be people who can warm the hearts of the people, who walk through the dark night with them, who know how to dialogue and to descend themselves into their people’s night, into the darkness, but without getting lost. The people of God want pastors, not clergy acting like bureaucrats or government officials. The bishops, particularly, must be able to support the movements of God among their people with patience, so that no one is left behind.
- This is a service that all of us must seek to give, but those of us who take the faith more seriously, to whom more has been given, are even more summoned to this service by the Lord and should seek to do it from their heart.
 - (March 28 Casal del Marmo) [Jesus] himself explains to his disciples: “Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord – and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you” (Jn 13:12-15). It is the Lord’s example: he is the most important, and he washes feet, because with us what is highest must be at the service of others. This is a symbol, it is a sign, right? Washing feet means: “I am at your service”. And with us too, don’t we have to wash each other’s feet day after day? But what does this mean? That all of us must help one another. ... Help one another: this is what Jesus teaches us and this

what I am doing, and doing with all my heart, because it is my duty. As a priest and a bishop, I must be at your service. But it is a duty which comes from my heart: I love it. I love this and I love to do it because that is what the Lord has taught me to do. ... Now we will perform this ceremony of washing feet, and let us think, let each one of us think: "Am I really willing, willing to serve, to help others?". Let us think about this, just this. And let us think that this sign is a caress of Jesus, which Jesus gives, because this is the real reason why Jesus came: to serve, to help us.

- This type of service comes from a new form of hearing. If we're truly listening to the voice of the Lord, then, with him, we'll hear the cry of the poor, the cry of our brothers and sisters in need — and cry with them.
 - (Lampedusa, July 8, 2013) God's two questions echo even today, as forcefully as ever! How many of us, myself included, have lost our bearings; we are no longer attentive to the world in which we live; we don't care; we don't protect what God created for everyone, and we end up unable even to care for one another! And when humanity as a whole loses its bearings, it results in tragedies like the one we have witnessed.
 - "Where is your brother?" His blood cries out to me, says the Lord. This is not a question directed to others; it is a question directed to me, to you, to each of us. These brothers and sisters of ours were trying to escape difficult situations to find some serenity and peace; they were looking for a better place for themselves and their families, but instead they found death. How often do such people fail to find understanding, fail to find acceptance, fail to find solidarity. And their cry rises up to God! Once again I thank you, the people of Lampedusa, for your solidarity. I recently listened to one of these brothers of ours. Before arriving here, he and the others were at the mercy of traffickers, people who exploit the poverty of others, people who live off the misery of others. How much these people have suffered! Some of them never made it here.
 - "Where is your brother?" Who is responsible for this blood? In Spanish literature we have a comedy of Lope de Vega that tells how the people of the town of Fuente Ovejuna kill their governor because he is a tyrant. They do it in such a way that no one knows who the actual killer is. So when the royal judge asks: "Who killed the governor?", they all reply: "Fuente Ovejuna, sir". Everybody and nobody! Today too, the question has to be asked: Who is responsible for the blood of these brothers and sisters of ours? Nobody! That is our answer: It isn't me; I don't have anything to do with it; it must be someone else, but certainly not me. Yet God is asking each of us: "Where is the blood of your brother which cries out to me?" Today no one in our world feels responsible; we have lost a sense of responsibility for our brothers and sisters. We have fallen into the hypocrisy of the priest and the levite whom Jesus described in the parable of the Good Samaritan: we see our brother half dead on the side of the road, and perhaps we say to ourselves: "poor soul...!", and then go on our way. It's not our responsibility, and with that we feel reassured, assuaged. The culture of comfort, which makes us think only of ourselves, makes us insensitive to the cries of other people, makes us live in soap bubbles which, however lovely, are insubstantial; they offer a fleeting and empty illusion which results in indifference to others; indeed, it even leads to the globalization of indifference. In this globalized world, we have fallen into globalized indifference. We have become used to the suffering of others: it doesn't affect me; it doesn't concern me; it's none of my business
 - "Adam, where are you?" "Where is your brother?" These are the two questions which God asks at the dawn of human history, and which he also asks each man and woman in our own day, which he also asks us. But I would like us to ask a third question: "Has any one of us wept because of this situation and others like it?" Has any one of us grieved for the death of these brothers and sisters? Has any one of us wept for these persons who were on the boat? For the young mothers carrying their babies? For these men who were looking for a means of supporting their families? We are a society that has forgotten how to weep, how to experience compassion – "suffering with" others: the globalization of indifference has taken from us the ability to weep! In the Gospel we have heard the crying, the wailing, the great lamentation: "Rachel weeps for her children... because they are no more". Herod sowed death to protect his own comfort, his own soap bubble. And so it continues... Let us ask the Lord to remove the part of Herod that lurks in our hearts; let us ask the Lord for the grace to weep over our indifference, to weep over the cruelty of our world, of our own hearts, and

of all those who in anonymity make social and economic decisions which open the door to tragic situations like this. "Has any one wept?" Today has anyone wept in our world?

- God's world is one in which we take responsibility for others
 - (Syria Vigil, Sept 7) God's world is a world where everyone feels responsible for the other, for the good of the other. This evening, in reflection, fasting and prayer, each of us deep down should ask ourselves: Is this really the world that I desire? Is this really the world that we all carry in our hearts? But then we wonder: Is this the world in which we are living?... When man thinks only of himself, of his own interests and places himself in the center, when he permits himself to be captivated by the idols of dominion and power, when he puts himself in God's place, then all relationships are broken and everything is ruined; then the door opens to violence, indifference, and conflict. This is precisely what the passage in the Book of Genesis seeks to teach us in the story of the Fall. It is exactly in this chaos that God asks man's conscience: "Where is Abel your brother?" and Cain responds: "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" (Gen 4:9). We too are asked this question, it would be good for us to ask ourselves as well: Am I really my brother's keeper? Yes, you are your brother's keeper! To be human means to care for one another! But when harmony is broken, a metamorphosis occurs: the brother who is to be cared for and loved becomes an adversary to fight, to kill.
- We must make our neighbor's welfare part of our business
 - (July 24, Visit to St. Francis of Assisi Hospital in Rio) In the Gospel, we read the parable of the Good Samaritan, that speaks of a man assaulted by robbers and left half dead at the side of the road. People pass by him and look at him. But they do not stop, they just continue on their journey, indifferent to him: it is none of their business! How often we say: it's not my problem! How often we turn the other way and pretend not to see! Only a Samaritan, a stranger, sees him, stops, lifts him up, takes him by the hand, and cares for him (cf. Lk 10:29-35).
- Jesus calls us to this type of charity. We will be judged by our charity.
 - (Nov 27, 2013 Catechesis) Against this horizon we understand Jesus' invitation to be ever ready, watchful, knowing that life in this world is given to us also in order to prepare us for the afterlife, for life with the heavenly Father. And for this there is a sure path: preparing oneself well for death, staying close to Jesus. This is surety: I prepare myself for death by staying close to Jesus. And how do we stay close to Jesus? Through prayer, in the Sacraments and also in the exercise of charity. Let us remember that he is present in the weakest and the most needy. He identified himself with them, in the well known parable of the Last Judgment, in which he says: "for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me... 'as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me'" (Mt 25:35-36, 40). Therefore, a sure path comes by recovering the meaning of Christian charity and fraternal sharing, by caring for the bodily and spiritual wounds of our neighbor. Solidarity in sharing sorrow and infusing hope is a premise and condition for receiving as an inheritance that Kingdom which has been prepared for us. The one who practices mercy does not fear death. Think well on this: the one who practices mercy does not fear death! Do you agree? Shall we say it together so as not to forget it? The one who practices mercy does not fear death. And why does he not fear it? Because he looks death in the face in the wounds of his brothers and sisters, and he overcomes it with the love of Jesus Christ. If we will open the door of our lives and hearts to our littlest brothers and sisters, then even our own death will become a door that introduces us to heaven, to the blessed homeland, toward which we are directed, longing to dwell forever with God our Father, with Jesus, with Our Lady and with the Saints.
- When we give alms, we should do so respecting the other's dignity
 - (May 18 Pentecost Vigil with Ecclesial Movements) When I go to hear confessions – I still can't, because to go out to hear confessions... from here it's impossible to go out, but that's another problem — when I used to go to hear confessions in my previous diocese, people would come to me and I would always ask them: "Do you give alms?" — "Yes, Father!" "Very good." And I would ask them two further questions: "Tell me, when you give alms, do you look the person in the eye?"

“Oh I don’t know, I haven’t really thought about it”. The second question: “And when you give alms, do you touch the hand of the person you are giving them to or do you toss the coin at him or her?” This is the problem: the flesh of Christ, touching the flesh of Christ, taking upon ourselves this suffering for the poor. Poverty for us Christians is not a sociological, philosophical or cultural category, no. It is theological. I might say this is the first category, because our God, the Son of God, abased himself, he made himself poor to walk along the road with us.

- Loving our neighbor ultimately demands giving our life for them.
 - (May 14 homily) The Pope commented on the day’s Readings, recalling that in this time of waiting for the Holy Spirit, the idea of love returns, the new Commandment. “Jesus says something remarkable to us: ‘Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends’. Love always takes this path: to give one’s life. To live life as a gift, a gift to be given — not a treasure to be stored away. And Jesus lived it in this manner, as a gift. And if we live life as a gift, we do what Jesus wanted: ‘I appointed you that you should go and bear fruit’”. So, we must not burn out life with selfishness.
- The mystery of Jesus’ incarnation teaches us to humble ourselves and put ourselves at others service. Whatever we do to others we do to Jesus.
 - (Dec 18, 2013 Catechesis) We may derive two considerations from the joyous contemplation of the mystery of the Son of God born for us. The first is that if God, in the Christmas mystery, reveals himself not as One who remains on high and dominates the universe, but as the One who bends down, descends to the little and poor earth, it means that, to be like him, we should not put ourselves above others, but indeed lower ourselves, place ourselves at the service of others, become small with the small and poor with the poor. It is regrettable to see a Christian who does not want to lower himself, who does not want to serve. A Christian who struts about is ugly: this is not Christian, it is pagan. The Christian serves, he lowers himself. Let us be sure that our brothers and sisters do not ever feel alone! The second consequence: if God, through Jesus, involved himself with man to the point of becoming one of us, it means that whatever we have done to a brother or a sister we have done to him. Jesus himself reminded us of this: whoever has fed, welcomed, visited, loved one of the least and poorest of men, will have done it to the Son of God.
- The Church today must sing a new song of service
 - (WYD, July 28) The final word: serve. The opening words of the psalm that we proclaimed are: “Sing to the Lord a new song” (Psalm 95:1). What is this new song? It does not consist of words, it is not a melody, it is the song of your life, it is allowing our life to be identified with that of Jesus, it is sharing his sentiments, his thoughts, his actions. And the life of Jesus is a life for others. The life of Jesus is a life for others. It is a life of service. In our Second Reading today, Saint Paul says: “I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more” (1 Cor 9:19). In order to proclaim Jesus, Paul made himself “a slave to all”. Evangelizing means bearing personal witness to the love of God, it is overcoming our selfishness, it is serving by bending down to wash the feet of our brethren, as Jesus did.
- The Church is a communion of charity
 - (November 6, 2013 Catechesis) And we come to the third aspect of communion in holy things, that is, communion in charity, the unity among us that creates charity, love. The gentiles, observing the early Christians, said: how they love each other, how they wish one another well! They do not hate, they do not speak against one another. This is the charity, the love of God that the Holy Spirit puts in our hearts. The charisms are important in the life of the Christian community, but they are always a means for growth in charity, in love, which St Paul sets above the charisms (cf. 1 Cor 13:1-13). Without love, in fact, even the most extraordinary gifts are in vain; this man heals people, he has that power, this other virtue... but does he have love and charity in his heart? If he does then all is well, but if he does not he is no servant of the Church. Without love no gift or charism could serve the Church, for where there is not love there is an emptiness that becomes filled with selfishness. And I ask myself: if we all were egotistical, could we live in communion and peace? No, it's not possible, that is why it is necessary that love unite us. Our smallest gesture of love benefits everyone! Therefore, to live out unity in the Church and communion in charity means not seeking one’s own

interests but sharing the suffering and the joy of one's brothers (cf. 1 Cor 12:26), ready to carry the weight of the poorest and the weakest. This fraternal solidarity is not a figure of speech, a saying, but an integral part of the communion among Christians. If we live it, we are a sign to the world, the "sacrament" of God's love. This is what we are one for another and what we are for all! It is not just petty love that we can offer one another, but something much more profound: it is a communion that renders us capable of entering into the joy and sorrow of others and making them sincerely our own. Often we are too dry, indifferent and detached and rather than transmitting brotherhood, we communicate bad temper, coldness and selfishness. And with bad temper, coldness and selfishness the Church cannot grow; the Church grows only by the love that comes from the Holy Spirit. The Lord invites us to open ourselves to communion with him, in the Sacraments, in the charisms and in charity, in order to live out our Christian vocation with dignity!

- (B16 in Deus Caritas Est) As the years went by and the Church spread further afield, the exercise of charity became established as one of her essential activities, along with the administration of the sacraments and the proclamation of the word: love for widows and orphans, prisoners, and the sick and needy of every kind, is as essential to her as the ministry of the sacraments and preaching of the Gospel. The Church cannot neglect the service of charity any more than she can neglect the Sacraments and the Word. (It led to the institutionalization of charity, because individual charity was not enough).
- We must wake up the world with our charity
 - (Nov 29 meeting with Major Superiors of Religious Men) The witness that can really attract is that associated with attitudes that are uncommon: generosity, detachment, sacrifice, self-forgetfulness in order to care for others. This is the witness, the "martyrdom" of religious life. It "sounds an alarm" for people. Religious say to people with their life: "What's happening?" "These people are telling me something! ... The Church," therefore, "must be attractive. Wake up the world! Be witnesses of a different way of doing things, of acting, of living! It is possible to live differently in this world.
- Deacons in particular must take up this call to charity
 - The early apostolic writings, basing themselves on what Christ himself said and did in the Gospel — calling us to love our neighbor just as he has loved us, illustrating the call to love with the unforgettable image of the Good Samaritan whom Jesus himself enfleshed, washing the apostles' feet and instructing them to do the same, coming not to be served but to serve and give his whole life as the charitable ransom for the many, reminding us that we will be judged on how we respond with love to the hungry, thirsty, naked, infirm, imprisoned, and stranger — reminded the early Christians and us today of the indispensable connection between real faith and charity.
 - St. James
 - James 2:14-18: "What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and has no food for the day, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well," but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is it? So also faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead. Indeed someone might say, "You have faith and I have works." Demonstrate your faith to me without works, and I will demonstrate my faith to you from my works."
 - St. John
 - 1 John 3: 16-18: The way we came to know love was that he laid down his life for us; so we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If someone who has worldly means sees a brother in need and refuses him compassion, how can the love of God remain in him? Children, let us love not in word or speech but in deed and truth.
 - 1 John 4:20-21: If anyone says, "I love God," but hates his brother, he is a liar; for whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. This is the commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.
 - St. Paul

- 1 Cor 12:31, 13:1-3: Strive eagerly for the greatest spiritual gifts. But I shall show you a still more excellent way. If I speak in human and angelic tongues but do not have love, I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy and comprehend all mysteries and all knowledge; if I have all faith so as to move mountains but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away everything I own, and if I hand my body over so that I may boast but do not have love, I gain nothing.
- Charity is the fruit of true faith, the flourishing of the Christian life. This is a message for every Christian. But it's a message that is particularly associated with the vocation, life and ministry of deacons. John Paul II said in Detroit in 1987, "The service of the deacon is the Church's service sacramentalized."
- When Pope Paul VI restored the permanent diaconate following the recommendation of the Second Vatican Council, he said, "'the permanent diaconate should be restored... as a driving force for the Church's service (*diakonia*) towards the local Christian communities, and as a sign or sacrament of the Lord Christ himself, who 'came not to be served but to serve'" (Pauli VI *Ad Pascendum*, Intr.).
- Permanent Deacons are meant to be the sacramentalization, the efficaciously visible sign, of the Church's charity, of Christ the servant, and the catalyst and driving force of the Church's whole mission continuing Christ's charity in the midst of the world.
- Acts of the Apostles
 - We see this truth at the foundation of the diaconate in the early Church.
 - Pope Benedict gave a tremendously beautiful and deep reflection on calling of the first deacons in Acts 6 in his catecheses on prayer. He pondered the "serious problem that the first Christian community of Jerusalem was obliged to face and to solve ... concerning pastoral charity to lonely people and those in need of assistance and help." He said:
 - This is not a secondary matter for the Church and at that time risked creating divisions in the Church; the number of disciples, in fact continued to increase, but the Greek-speaking began to complain about those who spoke Hebrew because their widows were left out of the daily distribution (cf. Acts 6:1). To face this urgent matter that concerned a fundamental aspect of community life, namely, charity to the weak, the poor and the defenseless, and justice, the Apostles summoned the entire group of disciples. In that moment of pastoral emergency the Apostles' discernment stands out. They were facing the primary need to proclaim God's word in accordance with the Lord's mandate but — even if this was a priority of the Church — they considered with equal gravity the duty of charity and justice, that is, the duty to help widows and poor people and, in response to the commandment of Jesus: love one another as I have loved you (cf. Jn 15:12,17), to provide lovingly for their brothers and sisters in need.
 - So it was that difficulties arose in the two activities that must coexist in the Church — the proclamation of the word, the primacy of God and concrete charity, justice — and it was necessary to find a solution so that there would be room for both, for their necessary relationship. The Apostles' reflection is very clear, they say, as we heard: "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brethren, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:2-4).
 - Two points stand out:
 - first, since that moment a ministry of charity has existed in the Church. The Church must not only proclaim the word but must also put the word — which is charity and truth — into practice.
 - And, the second point: these men must not only enjoy a good reputation but also they must be filled with the Holy Spirit and with wisdom; in other words they cannot merely be organizers who know what "to do", but must "act" in

a spirit of faith with God's enlightenment, with wisdom of heart. Hence their role — although it is above all a practical one — has nonetheless also a spiritual function. Charity and justice are not only social but also spiritual actions, accomplished in the light of the Holy Spirit.

- The Apostles confronted this situation with great responsibility. They took the following decision: seven men were chosen; the Apostles prayed the Holy Spirit to grant them strength and then laid their hands on the seven so that they might dedicate themselves in a special way to this ministry of charity. ...
- Even the difficulties that the Church was encountering as she faced the problem of service to the poor, the issue of charity, was overcome in prayer, in the light of God, of the Holy Spirit. The Apostles did not limit themselves to ratifying the choice of Stephen and the other men but “they prayed and laid their hands upon them” (Acts 6:6).
- With the act of the laying on of hands, the Apostles conferred a special ministry on seven men so that they might be granted the corresponding grace. The emphasis on prayer — “after praying” — they say, is important because it highlights the gesture's spiritual dimension; it is not merely a question of conferring an office as happens in a public organization, but is an ecclesial event in which the Holy Spirit appropriates seven men chosen by the Church, consecrating them in the Truth that is Jesus Christ: he is the silent protagonist, present during the imposition of hands so that the chosen ones may be transformed by his power and sanctified in order to face the practical challenges, the pastoral challenges. And the emphasis on prayer also reminds us that the response to the Lord's choice and the allocation of every ministry in the Church stems solely from a close relationship with God, nurtured daily.
- Dear brothers and sisters, the pastoral problem that induced the Apostles to choose and to lay their hands on seven men charged with the service of charity, so that they themselves might be able to devote themselves to prayer and to preaching the word, also indicates to us the primacy of prayer and of the word of God which, however, then result in pastoral action. For pastors, this is the first and most valuable form of service for the flock entrusted to them.
- The development of the service of deacons in the early Church
 - Famous story of the deacon St. Lawrence
 - Pope Benedict, in the second section of *Deus Caritas Est*, gave a history of the development of the Church's organized charity in the early Church by tracing, in a sense, the history of the diaconate.
 - DCE 20: Love of neighbor, grounded in the love of God, is first and foremost a responsibility for each individual member of the faithful, but it is also a responsibility for the entire ecclesial community at every level: from the local community to the particular Church and to the Church universal in its entirety. As a community, the Church must practise love. Love thus needs to be organized if it is to be an ordered service to the community. The awareness of this responsibility has had a constitutive relevance in the Church from the beginning: “All who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need” (*Acts* 2:44-5). In these words, Saint Luke provides a kind of definition of the Church, whose constitutive elements include fidelity to the “teaching of the Apostles”, “communion” (*koinonia*), “the breaking of the bread” and “prayer” (cf. *Acts* 2:42). The element of “communion” (*koinonia*) is not initially defined, but appears concretely in the verses quoted above: it consists in the fact that believers hold all things in common and that among them, there is no longer any distinction between rich and poor (cf. also *Acts* 4:32-37). As the Church grew, this radical form of material communion could not in fact be preserved. But its essential

core remained: within the community of believers there can never be room for a poverty that denies anyone what is needed for a dignified life

- DCE 21: A decisive step in the difficult search for ways of putting this fundamental ecclesial principle into practice is illustrated in the choice of the seven, which marked the origin of the diaconal office (cf. *Acts* 6:5-6). In the early Church, in fact, with regard to the daily distribution to widows, a disparity had arisen between Hebrew speakers and Greek speakers. The Apostles, who had been entrusted primarily with “prayer” (the Eucharist and the liturgy) and the “ministry of the word”, felt overburdened by “serving tables”, so they decided to reserve to themselves the principal duty and to designate for the other task, also necessary in the Church, a group of seven persons. Nor was this group to carry out a purely mechanical work of distribution: they were to be men “full of the Spirit and of wisdom” (cf. *Acts* 6:1-6). In other words, the social service which they were meant to provide was absolutely concrete, yet at the same time it was also a spiritual service; theirs was a truly spiritual office which carried out an essential responsibility of the Church, namely a well-ordered love of neighbor. With the formation of this group of seven, “*diaconia*”—the ministry of charity exercised in a communitarian, orderly way—**became part of the fundamental structure of the Church**
- DCE 22. As the years went by and the Church spread further afield, the exercise of charity became established as one of her essential activities, along with the administration of the sacraments and the proclamation of the word: love for widows and orphans, prisoners, and the sick and needy of every kind, is as essential to her as the ministry of the sacraments and preaching of the Gospel. The Church cannot neglect the service of charity any more than she can neglect the Sacraments and the Word. ... When Ignatius of Antioch († c. 117) described the Church of Rome as “presiding in charity (*agape*)”, we may assume that with this definition he also intended in some sense to express her concrete charitable activity.
- DCE 23. Towards the middle of the fourth century we see the development in Egypt of the “*diaconia*”: the institution within each monastery responsible for all works of relief, that is to say, for the service of charity. By the sixth century this institution had evolved into a corporation with full juridical standing, which the civil authorities themselves entrusted with part of the grain for public distribution. In Egypt not only each monastery, but each individual Diocese eventually had its own *diaconia*; this institution then developed in both East and West. Pope Gregory the Great († 604) mentions the *diaconia* of Naples, while in Rome the *diaconiae* are documented from the seventh and eighth centuries. But charitable activity on behalf of the poor and suffering was naturally an essential part of the Church of Rome from the very beginning, based on the principles of Christian life given in the *Acts of the Apostles*. It found a vivid expression in the case of the deacon Lawrence († 258). The dramatic description of Lawrence's martyrdom was known to Saint Ambrose († 397) and it provides a fundamentally authentic picture of the saint. As the one responsible for the care of the poor in Rome, Lawrence had been given a period of time, after the capture of the Pope and of Lawrence's fellow deacons, to collect the treasures of the Church and hand them over to the civil authorities. He distributed to the poor whatever funds were available and then presented to the authorities the poor themselves as the real treasure of the Church. Whatever historical reliability one attributes to these details, Lawrence has always remained present in the Church's memory as a great exponent of ecclesial charity.
- DCE 25: The Church's deepest nature is expressed in her three-fold responsibility: of proclaiming the word of God (*kerigma-martyria*), celebrating the sacraments (*leitourgia*), and exercising the ministry of charity (*diakonia*). These duties presuppose each other and are inseparable. For the Church, charity is not a kind of welfare

activity which could equally well be left to others, but is a part of her nature, an indispensable expression of her very being.

- Deacons fulfill all three responsibilities, through their proclamation of the world, their participation in the sacraments, particularly that of the Eucharist, and especially in the ministry of charity.
- John Paul II in Detroit, 1987
 - When Blessed John Paul II came to Detroit in 1987 to meet with the 8,000 Permanent Deacons from across the United States and their wives and families, he could have spoken about many themes with them, but the one on which he wanted to focus was on what we called the “vocation to service.” He said:
 - “This is at the very heart of the diaconate to which you have been called: *to be a servant of the mysteries of Christ and, at one and the same time, to be a servant of your brothers and sisters.* That these two dimensions are inseparably joined together in one reality shows the important nature of the ministry which is yours by ordination
 - *The service of the deacon is the Church’s service sacramentalized.* Yours is not just one ministry among others, but it is truly meant to be, as Paul VI described it, a “driving force” for the Church’s *diakonia*. By your ordination you are configured to Christ in his servant role. You are also meant to be *living signs of the servanthood of his Church.*
 - If we keep in mind the deep spiritual nature of this *diakonia*, then we can better appreciate *the interrelation of the three areas of ministry* traditionally associated with the diaconate, that is, the ministry of the word, the ministry of the altar, and the ministry of charity. Depending on the circumstances, one or another of these may receive particular emphasis in an individual deacon’s work, but these three ministries are inseparably joined together as one in the service of God’s redemptive plan. This is so because the word of God inevitably leads us to the Eucharistic worship of God at the altar; in turn, this worship leads us to a new way of living which expresses itself in acts of charity.
 - This charity is both *love of God and love of neighbor*. As the First Letter of John teaches us, “one who has no love for the brother whom he can see cannot love the God whom he has not seen . . . whoever loves God must also love his brother” (1Jo. 4, 20-21). By the same token, acts of charity which are not rooted in the word of God and in worship cannot bear lasting fruit. “*Apart from me, Jesus says, “you can do nothing” (Jo. 15-5).* The ministry of charity is confirmed on every page of the Gospel; it demands a constant and radical conversion of heart.
 - In the midst of the human condition it is a great source of satisfaction to learn that so many permanent deacons in the United States are involved in *direct service to the needy*: to the ill, the abused and battered, the young and old, the dying and bereaved, the deaf, blind and disabled, those who have known suffering in their marriages, the homeless, victims of substance abuse, prisoners, refugees, street people, the rural poor, the victims of racial and ethnic discrimination, and many others. As Christ tells us, “as often as you did it for one of my least brothers, you did it for me”
 - Taking an active part in society belongs to the baptismal mission of every Christian in accordance with his or her state in life, but the permanent deacon has a special witness to give. The sacramental grace of his ordination is meant to strengthen him and to make his efforts fruitful, even as his secular occupation gives him entry into the temporal sphere in a way that is normally not appropriate for other members of the clergy. At the same time, the fact that he is an ordained minister of the Church brings a special dimension to his efforts in the eyes of those with whom he lives and works.
 - Equally important is the contribution that a married deacon makes to the transformation of family life. He and his wife, having entered into a communion of life, are called to help and serve each other

- By the standards of this world, servanthood is despised, but in the wisdom and providence of God it is *the mystery through which Christ redeems the world. And you are ministers of that mystery, heralds of that Gospel.* You can be sure that one day you will hear the Lord saying to each of you: "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Lord"
 - Mary, as she continues to proclaim: "I am the servant of the Lord" (Lmc. 1, 38). *And in the example of her servanthood we see the perfect model of our own call to the discipleship of our Lord Jesus Christ and to the service of his Church.*
- For us, Mary is a great model of charity and shows us how to do it with faith.
 - (October 23, 2013 Catechesis) We come to the second aspect: Mary as the model of charity. In what way is Mary a living example of love for the Church? Let us think the readiness she showed toward her cousin Elizabeth. In visiting her, the Virgin Mary brought not only material help — she brought this too — but she also brought Jesus, who was already alive in her womb. Bringing Jesus into that house meant bringing joy, the fullness of joy. Elizabeth and Zechariah were rejoicing at a pregnancy that had seemed impossible at their age, but it was the young Mary who brought them the fullness of joy, the joy that comes from Jesus and from the Holy Spirit, and is expressed by gratuitous charity, by sharing with, helping, and understanding others. Our Lady also wants to bring the great gift of Jesus to us, to us all; and with him she brings us his love, his peace, and his joy. In this, the Church is like Mary: the Church is not a shop, she is not a humanitarian agency, the Church is not an NGO. The Church is sent to bring Christ and his Gospel to all. She does not bring herself — whether small or great, strong or weak, the Church carries Jesus and should be like Mary when she went to visit Elizabeth. What did Mary take to her? Jesus. The Church brings Jesus: this is the center of the Church, to carry Jesus! If, as a hypothesis, the Church were not to bring Jesus, she would be a dead Church. The Church must bring Jesus, the love of Jesus, the charity of Jesus.
- Conclusion
 - Story of journalist in India and the blind man with oranges.
 - Let's not let Pope Francis' words just be the subject of a retreat conference. Let's act on them, doing in our own situation what he's doing in his. He recognizes Christ in others and that's the source of his great energy in going to encounter him who came to proclaim the Gospel to the poor, to the handicapped, to the imprisoned, to the outcasts, to 100 out of 100. Pope Francis is trying to wake us up so that we can wake the whole world up. Pope Francis grasps that his life is a mission, the continuation of the mission of Christ's self-giving love. Let's ask the Lord for that same grace, so that we can complete his work as the Good Samaritan as missionaries of charity for a world in so much need!