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Welcoming and Merciful to the Poor

- "Do you resolve, for the sake of the Lord's name, to be welcoming and merciful to the poor, strangers, and to all who are in need?"
- Today the Church celebrates the memorial of St. John of God, the founder of the Brothers Hospitallers, otherwise known as the Fatebenefratelli, the "brothers who do good," and his memorial warrants changing the sequence of the resolutions bishops-elect profess, taking the seventh of the nine which concerns charity and starting with it this morning. St. John of God was born in Portugal in 1495. At 27 became a soldier in Castile. Like can happen in the military even today, he gave himself over to vice, became licentious and gave up the practice of the faith. Eventually the army was disbanded and he worked as a shepherd, but at the age of about 40, stung with remorse for his past sins, he resolved that he wanted to be healed and give himself over to God's service. He tried first as a martyr among the Christian slaves in Morocco, but despite his attempts, people thought him too crazy to kill. Returning home, he began to care for the poor and sick. Eventually hearing a sermon by St. John of Avila, he was so affected that he filled the Church with his cries, beating his breast and imploring God's mercy. St. John of Avila, declared a doctor of the Church in 2012, gave him God's mercy and set him straight. From that point forward, until he would die at 55, he immersed himself in God's mercy, seeking to pay it forward. He founded a hospital and allowed himself to be surrounded by those who would eventually be called the "Brothers Hospitallers." In a letter he wrote that the Church presents to us in the Office of Readings this morning, he describes this connection between having received God's mercy and sharing it, and how in sharing it, we open ourselves to receive it more, for a heart open in love is open to receive God's mercy: "If we look forward to receiving God's mercy, we can never fail to do good so long as we have the strength. For if we share with the poor, out of love for God, whatever he has given to us, we shall receive according to his promise a hundredfold in eternal happiness. What a fine profit, what a blessed reward! Who would not entrust his possessions to this best of merchants, who handles our affairs so well? With outstretched arms he begs us to turn toward him, to weep for our sins, and to become the servants of love, for ourselves, then for our neighbors. Just as water extinguishes a fire, so love wipes away sin." His life shows us how he advanced in the Lord's own mercy until it overflowed in such a way that his contemporaries simply called him "John of God."
- John "of God." There's something particularly beautiful about that genitive. People recognized God in him, that he was a gift from God, that he lived off of God, that, in a sense, as Francis came from Assisi, as Catherine came from Siena, and the other John came from Avila, his origin was, in a sense, the heart of God who is love. People saw in him what they would say and see in St. John Vianney three centuries later, *Dieu dans un homme*, "God in a man." And what a pleasing thing it would be if in life and in death, we might be so perfused by the charity of God that we would be known as Alexander of God, Thomas of God, Robert of God, Joseph of God, Peter of God, Roger of God.
- That's not just a pious thought. It's noteworthy that this resolution is the only one that states "For the sake of the Lord's name." The Church grasps that there's a connection between the way we are welcoming and merciful to the poor, strangers and all those in need and the hallowing of God's name. Jesus said at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, "So let your light shine before all so that, seeing your good deeds, they may glorify your Father in heaven." *Ubi caritas, ibi Deus est*. Our charity reveals something about the God who not only inspires it but makes it possible, by giving himself and all we have at our disposal to us so that we may share in his providential care.
- One of my spiritual fathers is Cardinal Sean O'Malley who, as Bishop of Fall River ordained me, and whom I have had the privilege to share many late night pizzas and gelatos. He told me that when he got the shocking news that Pope John Paul II was transferring him from St. Thomas in the Virgin Islands to Fall River in 1992 to help the Diocese address and heal from the James Porter sexual abuse scandals, the first

call he made was to St. Mother Teresa, begging her to send Missionaries of Charity with him, because he knew the Church in Fall River would have a difficult time recovering if it could not show the true face of the Church which is love.

- The Holy Father, Pope Francis, has captured the attention even of those who are suspicious of the Church and religious institutions in general because of his palpably generous concern and prioritization for those who are outcasts, for the marginalized, for the poor like the multitudes living in the *Villas Misérias* outside Buenos Aires, for prisoners, for immigrants and refugees, for the homeless. For me the iconic image of his papacy, which I got framed and keep in my office as a reminder of the charity to which I'm called, was his embrace of Vinicio Riva in November 2013. Vinicio might be the most repulsive figure I've ever seen. From the Italian town of Vicenza, Vinicio, 53 when he met the Pope, has suffered a lifetime of hurt and misunderstanding because of his being covered from head to toe with neurofibromatotic tumors, growths, swellings and itchy sores that bleed into his clothes each day. His Aunt Catherine Lotto eventually arranged, after many attempts, to take him from Vicenza to Rome for a papal audience. He was in a wheelchair — the tumors on his feet make it impossible for him to walk easily as they burst with blood and fill him with pain — and the Swiss guard kept ushering him forward. At the end of the audience, the Pope came to greet the handicapped. He went straight to Vinicio first. His Aunt Caterina said in an interview, “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.” He said that the encounter brought about a great change in him. “I feel stronger and happier. I feel I can move ahead because the Lord is protecting me.”
- I see every day at the United Nations the consequences of the Church's having the reputation for charity like this, helped by the example of Pope Francis. In an age that in some ways has gone beyond even relativism, which doubts epistemologically that anything can be known to be true or absolute, to one that seeks positively to create define reality anyway one wants — something we see in Justice Kennedy's 1992 *Casey v. Planned Parenthood* decision that “at the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life,” or in the ever growing list of possible genders that one can declare to be changed as easily as changing cell phone covers — many are suspicious of any limitations at all. Many view the truth not as something to set them free but as something to restrict their freedom for self re-creation, and for that reason, especially among the young formed by these ideas, leading with the truth can often hinder rather than help the new evangelization. But leading with charity is different. The witness of charity, especially when it involves true commitment and sacrifice for those whom an occasionally cold world recognizes has no right to it, can lead people to *caritas in veritate* and then to the *veritas* and *Veritas incarnate*. The Church's charity is what gives the greatest glory to God's name, it is the most effective and important beginning of the new evangelization, and the lack of charity among those in the Church is the greatest scandal.
- I've always been very moved by the image of the bishop in Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*. The character of Bishop Charles-François-Bienvenu Myriel, called Msgr. Bienvenu — “Monsignor Welcome” — in the novel is based on the real life Bishop of Digne, Bishop Bienvenue de Miollis (1753-1843). While a little-known priest, he had a chance encounter with Napoleon and praised him, as a result of which he was made a bishop. He continues to act like a common, compassionate, country priest, welcoming everyone. He moved into the small town hospital, so that the episcopal palace could be used as a hospital. He kept only a tenth of his salary for himself, spending the rest on alms. He once accompanied a condemned man to the scaffold, after the village priest refused to do so. Hugo's narrator summarizes the bishop's philosophy: “There are men who toil at extracting gold; he toiled at the extraction of pity. Universal misery was his mine. The sadness that reigned everywhere was but an excuse for unfailing kindness. Love each other; he declared this to be complete, desired nothing further, and that was the whole of his doctrine.” One night, as we see in the novel, Jean Valjean shows up at his door, asking a place to stay the night. Bienvenu graciously accepts him, feeds him, and gives him a bed. Valjean takes most of Bienvenu's silver and runs off in the night. The police

capture Valjean and take him back to face Bienvenu. When the police inform Bienvenu they have found the silver in Valjean's knapsack, Bienvenu tells the police that he had given them to Valjean as a gift. He chastises Valjean for not taking the silver candlesticks as well. After the police leave, Bienvenu tells Valjean to use the silver to become an honest man: "Forget not, never forget that you have promised me to use this silver to become an honest man.... Jean Valjean, my brother: you belong no longer to evil, but to good. It is your soul that I am buying for you. I withdraw it from dark thoughts and from the spirit of perdition, and I give it to God!" In the Musical, the point is made just as powerfully. "But remember this, my brother / See in this some higher plan / You must use this precious silver / To become an honest man / By the witness of the martyrs / By the Passion and the Blood / God has raised you out of darkness / I have bought your soul for God!"

- Victor Hugo was very anticlerical. He had a great anger against the Church. He could have easily based the bishop on a heartless ecclesiast, or one who lived a double life, or in some other way negative or even ordinary. He chose a bishop from his own lifetime whom he himself regarded with a reputation for sanctity and charity, and he did so intentionally. His son, who likewise resented the Church, tried to get him to make the figure who brought Valjean to conversion a doctor or a teacher. But Hugo kept the bishop, because he wanted through showing his charity the standard to which his readers ought to hold their own bishops. He thought most would fall short and the lack of charity in the episcopate would be sufficient justification for people to recognize that the Gospel didn't have the power to change us for the better if it wouldn't change even the leaders of the Church. I think it's a challenge in every age for us to become, for the sake of the Lord's name, Father Bienvenu, Bishop Caritas, Archbishop Misericordia.
- The documents of the Church focus very much on the centrality of charity in the life and ministry of bishops. We'll focus on what St. John Paul II in *Pastores Gregis*. He writes extensively about it.
 - **"Christ is the primordial icon of the Father** and the manifestation of his merciful presence among men and women. ... [The bishop's] **three functions of teaching, sanctifying and governing the People of God are to be carried out in imitation of the Good Shepherd**: with charity, knowledge of the flock, concern for all, mercy towards the poor, the stranger and those in need, and a willingness to seek out the lost sheep and to bring them back to the one sheepfold" (PG 7).
 - Saint Augustine defines the entirety of this episcopal ministry as an office of love: **amoris officium**. This gives us the certainty that the pastoral charity of Jesus Christ will never be lacking in the Church. (PG 9)
 - **Charity ... is in a sense the heart of the ministry of the Bishop, who is drawn into a dynamic pastoral pro-existence whereby he is impelled to live, like Christ the Good Shepherd, for the Father and for others, in the daily gift of self.** It is above all in exercising his own ministry, inspired by imitation of the charity of the Good Shepherd, that the Bishop is called to be sanctified and to sanctify. ... In the practice of charity, as the content of the pastoral ministry he has received, the Bishop becomes a sign of Christ and acquires that moral authority needed for the effective exercise of his juridical authority. **Unless the episcopal office is based on the witness of a holiness manifested in pastoral charity, humility and simplicity of life, it ends up being reduced to a solely functional role and, tragically, it loses credibility before the clergy and the faithful.** (PG 11)
 - The spiritual journey of the Bishop coincides ... **with that pastoral charity which must rightly be considered the soul of his apostolate.** ... **Here it is not only a matter of an existentia but indeed of a pro-existentia**, that is to say, of a way of living inspired by the supreme model of Christ the Lord and which is spent totally in worship of the Father and in service of neighbor (PG 13).
 - The Bishop, as a successor of the Apostles, is called to follow Christ along the path leading to the perfection of charity. (PG 18)
 - Although every Christian receives the love of God in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Baptism, the Bishop ... receives in his heart through the sacrament of Holy Orders the pastoral charity of Christ. PG 44.
 - One of the characteristic forms of this charity is compassion, like that of Christ, our High Priest, who was able to sympathize with our human weaknesses because he himself, like us, was tempted in

every respect yet, unlike us, without sin (cf. Heb 4:15). This compassion is always linked to the responsibility that the Bishop has accepted before God and the Church. It is in this way that he fulfills the promises and carries out the commitments made on the day of his episcopal ordination, when he freely assented to the Church's charge to care for the holy People of God as a devoted father and to guide them in the way of salvation; to be always welcoming and merciful, in the name of the Lord, to the poor, the sick and all those in need of comfort and help; and, like a good shepherd, to go in search of the sheep who stray, in order to bring them back to the fold of Christ. PG 54

- Bishops can make an important contribution to this discernment by insisting on the urgent need for a globalization in charity, without marginalization. ... Indeed, the globalization of solidarity is a direct consequence of that universal charity which is the heart of the Gospel. PG 69
- The Bishops of the third millennium are called to do what was done by so many saintly Bishops throughout history, up to our own time. Like Saint Basil, for example, who even built at the gates of Caesarea a large hospice for those in need, a true citadel of charity, which was called after him the Basiliad: this clearly demonstrates that "the charity of works ensures an unmistakable efficacy to the charity of words. 73.
- We can also mention *Apostolorum Successores*, the Directory for the Pastoral Life of Bishops
 - AS 38. The Bishop's life, weighed down by so many cares, runs the risk of becoming fragmented through the sheer multiplicity of tasks. Its inner unity and energy is found through pastoral charity, which may rightly be called the bond of episcopal perfection: it is a fruit of the grace and the character of the sacrament of episcopal ordination (116). "Saint Augustine defines the entirety of this episcopal ministry as an office of love: *amoris officium*. This gives us the certainty that the pastoral charity of Jesus Christ will never be lacking in the Church" (117). The Bishop's pastoral charity is the soul of his apostolate. "Here it is not only a matter of an *existentia*, but indeed of a *pro-existentia*, that is to say, of a way of living inspired by the supreme model of Christ the Lord and which is spent totally in worship of the Father and in service of neighbour" (118). Set on fire with this charity, the Bishop is moved to devout contemplation and imitation of Jesus Christ and his plan of salvation. Pastoral charity unites the Bishop to Jesus Christ, to the Church, and to the world which must be evangelized. It enables him to act as an ambassador for Christ (cf. 2 Cor 5:20) with decorum and competence, to spend himself every day for the clergy and the people entrusted to his care, and to offer himself as a sacrificial victim on behalf of his brothers and sisters (119). Having accepted the office of Pastor in the expectation not of tranquillity but of hard work (120), the Bishop should exercise his authority in a spirit of service and should consider it his vocation to serve the whole Church with the mind and heart of the Lord (121). The Bishop should set a fine example of fraternal charity and of a truly collegial spirit, offering loving care and support, both spiritual and material, to the coadjutor, the auxiliary and the Bishop Emeritus, to the diocesan presbyterate, the deacons and the faithful, and particularly to the poor and the needy. His home and his heart should be open to welcome, advise, encourage and console. The Bishop's charity should extend to the Pastors of neighbouring dioceses, especially those of the same metropolitan province, and to any Bishops who are in particular need (122).
 - AS 193. *Following in the Footsteps of Christ*. Christ gave his disciples the new commandment of charity: "even as I have loved you, that you also love one another" (Jn 13:34). Charity means loving as Christ loves. As a witness to this, the members of the Church have always performed countless charitable works. The Church understands that her mission, while spiritual in nature, embraces all the temporal aspects of human life, since the fulfilment of God's plan for mankind inextricably links the proclamation of the Gospel with the advancement of humanity (602). This firm conviction translates into multiple forms of assistance and wide-ranging benefits for the poor, the oppressed, the marginalized, and those who find themselves in situations of hardship or weakness, whom the Church looks upon with *preferential love* (603). With equal attention and solicitude, the Church, through her charitable activities, seeks to alleviate the "suffering of the soul" and the "suffering of the body". This obligation is made explicit in the Christian duty to perform spiritual and corporal works of mercy (604). These works have been practised in the Church from her inception, through almsgiving (cf. Acts 9:36; Heb 13:16), distribution of goods (cf. Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-37), service at table

(cf. *Acts* 6:2), and collections for the poor (cf. *Acts* 9:36,39; 10:2,31; *Gal* 2:9-10). In the beginning, the Apostles chose seven men who, through prayer and the laying on of hands, were designated for the ministry of charity (cf. *Acts* 6:2-6). For the Christian community of the present age, charity must also maintain a preeminent place, suggesting new forms of assistance and advancement to complement the traditional ones.

- AS 194. *The Church, Community of Charity*. The Bishop's responsibility in the realm of charity is apparent from the liturgy of episcopal ordination, when the candidate is asked the specific question: "Do you resolve, for the sake of the Lord's name, to be welcoming and merciful to the poor, to strangers, and to all who are in need?" Conscious of his office as president of the assembly and minister of charity in the Church, the Bishop personally does all that he can to fulfil this role in the manner which the human conditions of his flock demand and the means at his disposal allow. At the same time, he seeks to instill in all the faithful – clergy, religious and laity – a genuine attitude of charity and mercy towards all who labour and are heavy laden (*Mt* 11:28) so that in the entire diocese charity can reign as a way of accepting and witnessing to the command of Jesus Christ (605). In this manner, the faithful will experience the Church as a true family of God united in fraternal love (cf. *1 Pet* 1:22) and many more men and women will be inspired to follow Christ. Following the example of the good Samaritan (cf. *Lk* 10:25-37), the Bishop should see to it that the faithful are instructed, exhorted, and given every help to practise all the *works of mercy*, both personally in the unique circumstances of their lives, as well as communally, within various charitable organizations. As a result, the interconnection between preaching, liturgy and witness of life will find its expression in the Christian life. Inspired by God's Word and nourished by the sacraments, the faithful will endeavour to exercise that charity which gives authentic witness to the faith they profess. The practice of charity manifests the "new commandment" which reveals to the world the new life of the children of God. Moreover, the Bishop ought to encourage and promote all those charitable initiatives which have arisen throughout history and still today continue to emerge for the support and advancement of the most needy, both in first world countries and in developing nations. The Bishop should provide for the ongoing formation of those faithful who hold positions of leadership or responsibility in charitable initiatives. The ministry of charity, while it is an obligation for every Christian, is in a particular way a *diaconal charism* (606). For this reason, all candidates for sacred orders, but particularly aspirants to the permanent diaconate, need to prepare themselves through an adequate formation for their charitable ministry, which will be perfected in the light of experience. Permanent deacons, according to their personal talents, may be of particular assistance in the financial administration of the diocese. The pastoral care of the Church must also be directed toward social workers and health care professionals, especially if they are employed in Catholic health care institutions, so that they may discover the true significance of their vocation within their profession. Such work certainly requires technical competence, but also genuine sensitivity towards the human and spiritual needs of all persons, especially patients (607).
- AS 196. Without ever misusing works of charity for purposes of proselytism, the Bishop and the diocesan community exercise charity in order to bear witness to the Gospel, to inspire people to listen to the Word of God and to convert hearts. All the works of mercy and service undertaken by the Christian community need to manifest the supernatural spirit of charity motivating them, in order to offer an eloquent testimony which moves hearts to glorify our heavenly Father (cf. *Mt* 5:16).

- Examples of Bishops

- St. Nicholas
 - St. Nicholas was born in the town of Patara in the Roman Province of Asia, which is now southern Turkey. He grew up in the faith, formed in a good Christian home. After his parents both died when he was young, he looked to sow his life for the Gospel. Before he would enter training to become a priest and then later would become the Bishop of Myra (modern day Demre, Turkey), he would already be giving what he had for others. There's the famous story of his help for a poor family in Patara when he was still a layman. The culture of the time looked at women as burdens of the men who were responsible for them. In order for a girl to marry, the father had to provide her with a dowry so that her new husband would be able to pay for her upkeep, at least for some period of time. Families without

money for a dowry often couldn't get their daughters married. One poor father didn't know what to do for his three daughters for whom there was a danger, if he were to die or be incapable of work, that they would be driven or drawn into prostitution for survival. Nicholas heard of the family's situation and one night threw a bag of cold coins through the family's open window, enough for the dowry for the oldest daughter who was soon married. A short time later, Nicholas threw in another bag, sufficient for the dowry of the middle daughter, who likewise was married. Months later Nicholas tossed a third bag to help marry the third daughter of the father, who was waiting this time to find out who was the anonymous benefactor. The generosity of Saint Nicholas is continued through the generosity of Santa Claus (a translation of St. Nicholas) every Christmas, when all of us, like St. Nicholas, pay forward the generosity we have received from Christ. It's unsurprising that someone like St. Nicholas who had compassion on that poor family and sacrificed his inheritance to help them would likewise sow his entire life for Christ and his Gospel, becoming a laborer in his vineyard and continuing the Lord's work of proclamation, teaching and healing. The Lord is hoping that we will be touched in the same way as Nicholas was from the encounter with Christ who has come into our world, so that we, too, will engage with Christ in that third dynamism of the continuance of the Lord's compassionate work.

- St. Landry
 - St. Landry was Bishop of Paris in the middle of the Seventh Century. Not many people — outside of Louisiana, where there is a whole country named after him and a huge Church in Opelousas where I celebrated my tenth Mass a week or so after my ordination — have a devotion to him, but in Paris there's a chapel dedicated to him at Notre Dame Cathedral not to mention a beautiful one in St. Germain L'Auxerrois, where his relics were interred until they were destroyed during the French Revolution. St. Landry sold all of his own personal property and much of what the Church had to care for the poor of Paris during a famine and, because there were no hospitals to speak of at the time, he built the first, which he dedicated to St. Christopher, because so many of the sick were pilgrims who had no family to care for them. Eventually this hospital grew to become the huge institution called Hotel Dieu, God's hotel, where he sought to treat patients like they were Christ saying to him, "I will ill and you cared for me." His longing to see Christ in prayer allowed him to see Christ far more easily in his image, even when that image was sick, disfigured and ill.
- St. Charles Borromeo
 - St. Charles distinguished himself during the famine of 1571 by feeding 3,000 people a day from his own table and the devastating plague of 1576, where he assured the people he wouldn't leave and challenged his priests not to abandon their flock, urging them to prefer a holy death to a late one. When one of his priests lay dying he went to his bedside and prayed for his cure, saying, "You do not know the value of the life of a good priest," and the priest recovered. He organized hospitals and work projects, provided for orphans, he personally took Holy Communion to thousands quarantined in their homes, he had Masses offered in squares and crossroads so that the people could worship from their windows.
- Specifications
 - Welcoming
 - There are two ways to welcome. Embracing people when they come — not rejecting them — or going out to meet them. Both are expressions of mercy but one is more important. Lampedusa. Lesvos. Running out to meet someone like the Father of Prodigal Son. Creating a culture of welcoming. Leading by example.
 - Merciful
 - Literally a heart for the poor.
 - Splanchna of Jesus. Feeling it in our guts. Heseb. Rahamim.
 - Jesus did five things, that the Church is called to continue:
 - Feed
 - Heal

- Forgive
- Teach
- Pray and Call
- Poor
 - Jesus' preaching the Gospel to the Poor.
 - Preach through our own poverty.
 - Lifting them out of poverty. The Church has been acting on the SDGs for centuries.
 - Greatest poverty is spiritual.
 - Pope Francis calls the poor a theological category. God speaks to us not about the poor but the poor reveal God.
 - Hungry and thirsty, homeless, naked, struggling families.
 - Can we up our game?
- Strangers
 - Immigrants.
 - Refugees
 - Can we do something like the Pope has invited the Churches in Europe to do?
 - Many Catholics are opposed. They don't see Christ in strangers. Editorials in the Anchor.
- All those in need
 - Sick and Dying, to unleash love
 - Mentally ill, depressed.
 - Addicts
 - Unemployed.
 - Wounded. Victims.
 - Spiritually infamished.
- Tombs of the Popes
 - Virtues they were known for.
 - What would we want on ours?
- Inspiration
 - Thoughts of Pope Francis
 - (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.
 - (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. What violence occurs at that moment, how many conflicts, how many wars have marked our history! We need only look at the suffering of so many brothers and sisters. This is not a question of coincidence, but the truth: **we bring about the rebirth of Cain in every act of violence and in every war. All of us!** And even today we continue this history of conflict between brothers, even today we raise our hands against our brother. Even today, we let ourselves be guided by idols, by selfishness, by our own interests, and this attitude persists. We have perfected our weapons, our conscience has fallen asleep, and we have sharpened our ideas to justify ourselves. As if it were normal, we continue to sow destruction, pain, death! Violence and war lead only to death, they speak of death! Violence and war are the language of death!

- (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."
- (May 23 with Italian Bishops) This evening this Altar of the Confessio thus becomes for us the Sea of Tiberias, on whose shores we listen once again to the marvelous conversation between Jesus and Peter with the question addressed to the Apostle, but which must also resonate in our own hearts, as Bishops. "Do you love me?" "Are you my friend?" (cf. Jn 21, 15ff). ... The question is addressed to me and to each one of us, to all of us: if we take care not to respond too hastily and superficially it impels us to look within ourselves, to re-enter ourselves. "Do you love me?"; "Are you my friend?". The One who scrutinizes hearts (cf. Rom 8:27), makes himself a beggar of love and questions us on the one truly essential issue, a **premise and condition for feeding his sheep, his lambs, his Church.** ... The consequence of loving the Lord is **giving everything — truly everything, even our life — for him.** This is what must distinguish our pastoral ministry; it is the litmus test that tells us how deeply we have embraced the gift received in responding to Jesus' call, and how closely bound we are to the individuals and communities that have been entrusted to our care. We are not the expression of a structure or of an organizational need: even with the service of our authority we are called to be a sign of the presence and action of the Risen Lord; thus to build up the community in brotherly love. Not that this should be taken for granted: even the greatest love, in fact, when it is not constantly nourished, weakens and fades away.
- St. John Vianney always taught principally by his example.
 - Charity began at a very young age.
 - During the French Revolution, there were thousands of poor and displaced families. Even though the future saint's family was not particularly well off, they did have a farm. On any given night, the Vianneys took in over 20 mendicant families, with the women and girls sleeping in the house and the men and boys sleeping in the barn. The young John Vianney would often share the little food he had with the boys his age who often had gone for quite some time with no food at all.
 - As a priest, his greatest alms was making God's mercy available, but he was accustomed to sacrifice everything, his time, money and possessions as well.
 - On many occasions, he would exchange clothes with the poor.
 - In 1823, his fellow priests gave him a pair of velvet trousers, to keep him warm and last. On his return to his own parish one Saturday, he found a poor man who was

shaking in the cold. “Wait a moment, my friend,” he said and went behind the shrubs and brought him his pants. When his brother priests asked about the pants a short time later, he thanked them for them. “I put them to fairly good use; a poor man has borrowed them for an unlimited period.”

- One day, on the way to the school, he met a barefooted poor man. He gave him his shoes and went to la Providence trying to hide that he only had socks on. When people gave him a new pair of fur-lined shoes, he gave them away.
- He would keep only a few shirts in his wardrobe. Whenever he was given new ones, he would give them away. “Put in more,” he would tell Catherine.
- He would exchange his bread with the poor, giving the food prepared for him to the poor and used to buy from them the crusts they carried in the recesses of their wallets.
 - This was a means by which he sought to remove from the poor the shame of begging.
 - It was also a way that the poor wouldn’t feel inferior to him.
 - “Let’s be happy my friend to eat the bread of the poor: they are friends of Jesus Christ. It seems to me that I’m at the Lord’s table!”
- He used tact to not offend. To a family that he advanced the funds needed to open a small business, he said, “I do not lend. I give. Has not the good God been the first to give to me?”
- He sacrificed his entire familial inheritance in order to build a school for orphan girls.
- When people would give him money, it wouldn’t last long.
 - He called his cassock pocket *la poche à la navette* (the shuttle pocket) because whatever money was put in there was soon shuttled out.
 - Br. Athansius recounted, “He confided to me that often, before daybreak, he had already given away in charity over a hundred francs. He laughingly called the pocket of his cassock, in which he carried the money destined for the poor, *la poche à la navette* (the shuttle pocket) because money was continually going in and coming out of it. At night he reckoned up what he called his profits — that is, the few coins that he might still possess. When he found himself penniless he borrowed, for he would not send the destitute away with an alms.”
 - At times, he received considerable sums; they were expended in good works and in relieving the poor. “Such money seemed to burn his fingers,” Br. Athanasius said.
 - The mayor of Ars said, “His heart pitied all miseries. He had a tender love for the victims of misfortune. For them, he stripped himself of everything; he was forever giving, giving. To enable him to bestow alms, he sold all his personal property: his furniture, his linen, any trifle that belonged to him.”
- We’ve been talking so far about his material or monetary charity, which is something that religious with a vow of poverty are not able to imitate to the letter. But SJV’s material poverty was just one aspect of his deep compassion and love for those in need, his total pouring himself out for them out of love, which each of us is called to imitate.
 - He himself taught, from his own life, that charity takes many forms: “Charity is not entirely done with money.”
 - His greatest almsgiving was through the sacrament of confession.
 - Whatever the Lord put at his disposal, he tried to use for others.
- He readily admitted that his one experience of begging helped to convince him of how difficult it was to beg.
 - Pilgrimage to St. Francis Regis praying for help with this studies. 60 miles each way. He had made a vow not to buy anything on the journey, but to beg for his food. Most people refused him, such that he was eating grass and plants. It was so difficult to be rejected and to be hungry that he asked the priest at the sanctuary to commute his vow on the way home so that he could buy some provisions as needed. He always remembered this difficulty and so treated those who came to him as he would have wanted to be treated.
 - “I begged only one time in my life, and it was awful. It’s then that I know that it’s better to give than to ask.”

- He wasn't afraid of being exploited.
 - Fr. Raymond was sent by the bishop because he had developed a reputation of being too easily taken advantage of, but it didn't bother St. John Vianney.
 - The imposters or "casual poor" were treated well too. Fr. Toccanier said, "There are impostors. It must happen that you are frequently taken in if you give to all comers." "We are never taken in if we give to God," he replied.
 - "I prefer to be deceived than to deceive myself."
 - If he allowed himself to be exploited — and that is the lot of all who practice charity — he placed alms with discrimination. He displayed a larger liberality toward those whose need was the more urgent.
 - "If it's for the world that you give alms, you are right to complain [about being taken]. But if it's for the good God, whether one thanks you or not, what does it matter?"
 - He would defend the poor
 - "Some say to the poor haughtily, 'You are a parasite! You should get a job. You are young, you have strong arms.' You don't know if it pleases the good God to have this poor beg for his bread. You are exposing yourself to grumbling against God's will."
 - "Some say, 'Oh, he makes bad use of it.' The poor man will be judged on whatever use he makes of your alms, but you will be judged on the alms itself that you could have done but didn't."
 - He was in fact happy when the poor came to him.
 - He always addressed the poor as "my friends" with great tenderness. "How happy we are," he said, "that the poor should thus come to us; if they did not come we should have to look for them; and for that there is not the time."
- He was kind even to those whom the world would have not expected him to treat well.
 - One woman stole linen from the orphanage and money from the sacristy. She was arrested and imprisoned, despite Fr. Vianney's pleas for leniency. When she was released, she appealed to him again and he gave her clothes and money.
- He sought whenever possible to give alms anonymously
 - He used to love to tell the story of how St. Nicholas provided the dowry secretly to the three young women at risk for being sold into prostitution on account of their father's poverty. He used to refer to it as a model for charity.
 - He loved a blind woman, Mrs. Bichet, who lived near the Church. He could give her alms without her knowing who had done it.
- The extent of his charity
 - Toward the end of his life, he was paying the rent of at least 30 families, either at Ars or in the surrounding district. He became "miserly." Every year, at the beginning of November, he began to save, "I must pay for my farms," he used to say. Many households received fuel and flour from him. Every week, the mother of a family came to him from a distance to beg bread for her children
 - One of the Ars residents said she was sent as far as Lyons to give money to a family in need. When he couldn't give enough, he often found out where they lived to be able to send more.
 - "My secret is simple: give everything and retain nothing."
 - "The dentists ask five franc per tooth. If someone would give me five francs for each of the dozen teeth that remain, I would freely take them out for the poor."
 - "I would even sell my cadaver in order to have money for my poor."
- People often complained that he was "too" charitable, but he would always reply that we could never love God or others enough.
 - Ars became a center where the indigent converged. Some of the townspeople complained. When the mayor confronted the pastor about it, he said, "Did not our Lord say, the poor you shall always have with you?" He insisted that none be driven away.
 - St. John Vianney didn't know how not to love. He would often quote St. Augustine, who taught that "love doesn't know how to remain without action."
 - "You'll never be able to find a true love that doesn't show itself in deeds."

- “I’ve never seen someone ruined by doing good works!”
- In his preaching,
 - He would preach about the fact that when we give to the poor we give to Christ.
 - He focused on the Lord’s words about our judgment, that when we feed the hungry, clothe the naked, care for the sick, and welcome strangers, we do each of these things for the Lord.
 - He very much saw the Lord in the poor. He openly repeated in his catecheses how often Jesus often appeared as a beggar.
 - He told the story of St. Martin of Tours, after he had given half his great Roman cape to a shivering beggar at the gate of Amiens, saw the Lord in a dream covered in that Cape.
 - He told the story of St. John of God who saw a beggar with stigmata in his feet.
 - “Often we think we’re giving to a poor man but we find it’s the Lord.”
 - He would openly say, “When we give alms, we should think that it’s to the Lord and not to the poor that we’re giving.”
 - He would discuss how much care for the poor pleases God
 - “The poor are friends of God and the friends of the poor are friends of God.”
 - “You desire to pray to God and pass your day in the Church, but you dream that it would be better to work for some poor people you know and who are in great need: that’s more pleasing to God than a day passed in front of the holy tabernacle.”
 - He said that the poor were God’s gift to us to train us in holiness
 - “The poor man is only an instrument that God uses to make us to good. Nothing else.”
 - When we give a small bodily alms to the poor, they give us a great spiritual alms. “A small bodily alms gives way to a spiritual alms.”
 - “Never lose sight that alms erase our sins and preserve us from committing others.”
 - He tried to help them learn how to give with a cheerful and generous heart and not to pretend that they had nothing to give:
 - “You say you don’t have money to give alms, but you have enough money to buy another field!”
 - “If you have much, give much; if you have little, give little; but give with all your heart and with joy.”
 - He catechized that we have a duty to take care of the poor:
 - “Those who have more than they need must give it to the poor: it doesn’t belong to them.”
 - **“Your well-being is nothing other than a depository that God has put in your hands; after taking what is necessary for you and your family, the rest is owed to the poor.”**
 - Our salvation depends on it.
 - Basing himself on St. Paul’s words to the Corinthians that even if we have the faith to move mountains, and even if we understand all mysteries and hand over our bodies to be tortured for the faith, if we don’t have love, we are and gain nothing (1 Cor 13:1ff), he said:
 - “Dear Lord, how many Christians are damned through lack of charity! No, no, my dear brethren, even if you could perform miracles, you will never be saved if you do not have love. Not to have charity is not to know your religion; it is to have a religion of whim, mood and inclination. ... Without charity, you will never see God, you will never go to heaven!”
 - On the other hand, “Whoever possesses charity is sure that Heaven is for him!”
 - Almsgiving, he added, is a great means to pray to the Lord.
 - “We should never reject the poor. If we don’t give to them, we are asking God to inspire others to do the same to us.”
 - “To receive much, we need to give much.”
 - He would teach clearly that we are simply not good Christians unless we sacrificed heroically for others.
 - “All of our religion is but a false religion and all our virtues are mere illusions and we ourselves are only hypocrites in the sight of God if we have not that universal charity for

everyone, for the good and for the bad, for the poor people as well as for the rich, for all those who do us harm as much as those who do us good.”

- “The obligation we have to love our neighbor is so important that Jesus Christ put it into a Commandment that he placed immediately after that by which he commands us to love Him with all our hearts. He tells us that all the law and the prophets are included in this commandment to love our neighbor. Yes, my dear brethren, we must regard this obligation as the most universal, the most necessary and the most essential to religion and to our salvation. In fulfilling this Commandment, we are fulfilling all the others.”
- “Do you resolve, for the sake of the Lord’s name, to be welcoming and merciful to the poor, strangers, and to all who are in need?”