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Charity as a humble and daily service

On the eve of his death, Jesus gave his disciples, with the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, the gesture of washing their feet: "Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet" (Jn 13:14). Communion with Christ, dead and risen, comes through the washing of each other's feet. A gesture of hospitality performed by slaves, it signifies humble and daily service.

In this period of continuing pandemic, Christians must constantly rediscover this attention to one another in educational structures and their various places of life.

Recently, a parish priest shared with me his pain in seeing people standing alongside each other for months, years during celebrations without knowing each other. Christ's charity is moreover measured by our attention to those closest to us and the quality of our interpersonal relationships. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus asks a practical question: "Whose neighbour are you?" (Lk 10). Jesus teaches and gives us the example: from the beginning of his ministry among the crowds right up to the cross beside the criminals, he allows himself to be touched by the most diverse human situations and gives back to each person he meets his dignity as a human being and as a son of God.

Charity, a gift and a mission of the Risen Christ.

Enlightened by the Gospel of Christ and sustained by his Spirit of charity, the baptized person is asked to be supportive and to serve all people. In the family, at work and in all his or her activities, they can bear witness of their attachment to Christ, who saved the world through his love. In Christian institutions and wherever possible, they should also be able to give an account of their faith in Christ. Doing so does not mean forcing people to believe, but to respect them. They have a right to know who we belong to and in turn obtain the life of Christ resurrected from the dead.

In March last year, when the media mentioned the tenth anniversary of the outbreak of war in Iraq and Syria and the establishment of an Islamic state, I thought of Father Jacques Mourad¹, a priest of the Syriac Catholic Church. He oversaw the community of Qaryatayn, not far from Palmyra, where I had participated in the Easter celebrations of 2010. Father Jacques was kidnapped by men of the Islamic State group in May 2015 and endured a very trying captivity. Five months later, he was able to escape with the help of some young Muslims. They wanted to show him their gratitude for the aid that came in times of peace from the Christians of the West and that he had distributed to all those in need, regardless of religion.

The commitment of Father Mourad and the Christians persecuted for their faith are signs of an urgent call to always live of Christ's charity. A saying by Saint Ignatius of Loyola can help us to respond in a practical manner: "Act as if everything depended on you, knowing that in reality everything depends on God".

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