



FRIDAY OF THE FIFTH WEEK OF EASTER

ACTS 15:22-31

After the effort of discernment entailed by the Council at Jerusalem, we heard about the conclusions the disciples had come to, convinced that the Spirit had helped them: "It has been decided by the Holy Spirit and ourselves."

Our Assembly has also seen an effort of discernment in Faith and in love. I have no doubt that the Holy Spirit helped us.

The letter that was sent out with the personal delegates from Jerusalem to all places where there were converts from paganism, especially Antioch, contains some very interesting details:

- Those who "have disturbed you with their demands and have unsettled your minds" were disavowed.
- "Barnabas and Paul, men we highly respect who have dedicated their lives to the name of our Lord Jesus Christ," were warmly praised.
- The decision they came to was "not to saddle you with any burden beyond these essentials." Therefore, the theological conviction that salvation comes from Jesus was reaffirmed, and it wouldn't be necessary for converts from paganism to be subjected to the law of Moses. The tolerance and pluralistic interpretation of Paul and Barnabas prevailed.
- However, the three conditions enumerated by James were required, which seemed reasonable to them: abstaining from idolatry and sexual immorality, and not consuming blood or meat from strangled animals.

The decision was well received: "The community read it and were delighted with the encouragement it gave them."

We should also be glad about the goal we've achieved. Looking forward we usher in this new period in the life of our organisation.

The psalm captures this feeling: "I will thank you among the peoples, praise you among the nations".

When our communities – family or religious, parish or diocesan – or Caritas, meet together and strive to discern what precisely God's will is, the decisions we take should be like those of Jerusalem.

Caritas Internationalis General Assembly

22nd to 27th May 2011, Domus Mariae Palazzo Carpegna, Rome



This is because sometimes, in history and also in the present, we insist on imposing on others things that are not necessary, burdens that are not essential: for example, uniformity in non-central aspects. This can also happen in the conditions that all of us impose on the people we live with so that they may **“enjoy our acceptance”**: often we are not tolerant or pluralistic, and neither do we respect differences of character, culture or opinion.

In any discussion charity should prevail by tolerating many peripheral details and focusing on what is important. When we take a community decision, can we sincerely say that **“It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us”**? Or do we allow ourselves to be carried away by interests or stubbornness arising from our inertia or our community? Rather than being orthodox and in compliance with all laws, are our decisions encouraging like the one taken in Jerusalem? Do they fill those concerned with joy? For Saint Luke, joy is a clear sign of having acted in accordance with the Spirit.

JOHN 15:12-17

At the Last Supper, the thoughts of Jesus develop as in a circle. He had already insisted that his followers should “remain” in him, and specifically “If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love”.

Then he adds intimate nuances: “I no longer call you slaves, [...] I have called you friends”, It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you”. And above all, he points towards a more committed direction for this following: “This is my commandment: love one another as I have loved you.” Previously, he had drawn the most logical conclusion: if he loved his disciples, they should remain in his love and in return should love him. Then comes a more difficult conclusion: they should love each other. This is the path of CARITAS.

This is not just any love that he commends. He takes himself as a model. And he gave himself to others throughout his life, and he is about to do so more fully very soon: “No one has great love than this, to lay down one’s lives for one’s friends.”

“This is my commandment: love one another as I have loved you.”

The words of Jesus do not require a great deal of explanation. The fruit of Easter proposed to us here is fraternal love. A love that is by no means easy. Just as the love of Jesus for his own wasn't, for those for whom, after giving his utmost, he laid down his life. It is concrete, sacrificed love that is given: the love of Christ, of parents who sacrifice themselves for their children, the person who helps a friend even though it is inconvenient to do so, and the many people who know how to bring out the good in others beyond themselves, even though it requires effort and self-sacrifice.

In the life of our CARITAS communities – and all of us in one way or another are immersed in relations with others – this is the most difficult aspect of Jesus Christ for us to imitate. Knowing how to love as he did, going beyond ourselves and loving not with words but deeds, with understanding, timely assistance, a kind word, tolerance and free donation of ourselves.

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Every time we take communion we are invited to prepare our meeting with the Lord with a gesture of fraternal communion: **“give each other the sign of peace”**. We cannot say “Amen” to Christ if we don't feel like saying “Amen” to our brothers or sisters nearby, with whom we share our lives, even though they may have a different – or even not particularly pleasant – temperament. We cannot take communion with Christ if we are not prepared to grow in friendship with other people.

The Christ we consume at the Eucharist is the **“Body given for”, “the Blood shed for”**. The attitude of love towards others is inherent in the sacrament we celebrate and receive.

We live in a world where the name of God is sometimes associated with vengeance or even a duty of hatred and violence, and consequently this message of Caritas is both timely and significant.

The course to be firmly and decisively adopted is also very clear: “we must communicate love to other people.”

It must also be expressed as an ecclesial and organisational act. If it is true that the Church is an expression of God's love, of that love God feels for his human creature, it must also be true that the fundamental act of faith, which creates and unites the Church and gives us the hope of eternal life and of God's presence in the world, gives rise to an ecclesial act.

In practice, the Church must also love as a Church, as a community, institutionally. And this so-called Caritas is not a mere organisation like other philanthropic organisations, but a necessary expression of the deepest act of personal love with which God has created us, awakening in our hearts the impulse to love, a reflection of the God-Love who makes us in his image.

In order to express God's love, the Church, institutionally speaking, has the duty to love by proclaiming the Gospel, celebrating sacraments and exercising charity.

Due to this institutional practice of charity, the blessed Pope John Paul II granted Caritas Internationalis recognition of public canonical legal personality.

Namely, that as an institution the Caritas Internationalis Confederation officially acts "on behalf of the Church". With its works it puts into practice, constantly and everywhere, the Gospel of charity as the outcome of and in intimate connection with faith and the worship that the Catholic Church professes.

Caritas is the modern organisation of one of the basic duties of the Church.

It is not an “option” within the Church. It is not possible to have an ecclesial community organised around the Word and Divine Worship that as a community is not also organised in terms of this third dimension of the Church's mission, namely, through works of charity to bear faithful witness to the Good News that is fulfilled in Jesus Christ throughout history and to the ends of the earth.

Once again, and from now on, in the light of Pope Benedict XVI's thinking in *Deus Caritas est*, Caritas is an organisation of the Universal Church with an official mission to exercise one of the three great duties of the Church: to bear witness before the world through its works to the Word that proclaims faith and celebrates the liturgy.

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In and for itself Caritas Internationalis is an appreciable sign in the world of a state of faith: Christ's Charity which exhorts the Church to exercise His love.

Caritas, without words, evangelises.

All of us who work at Caritas should base ourselves on the experience of a personal encounter with Christ, whose love has touched the hearts of those he created, arousing in them a love for their neighbour.

Finally, in the light of *Deus caritas est*, I would like to propose an instruction to you: that there should be no ecclesial community in the Universal Church that has not organised the practice of charity, and also that no member of the community feels distant from the local institutional charity organisation that is incorporated within the Church's universal solidarity network, the real Christian communication network of goods.

One Human Family. Zero Poverty.