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Circ. N. 10/14-20
Prot. N. 2817/14-20

Rome, 2015 December 8th
the Feast of the Immaculate Conception

To all the sisters and brothers of the
Secular Franciscan Order (OFS)
all over the world

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

May the Good Lord give you his peace!

The Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy begins today, on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. Many of us have been waiting for this Holy Year, though we might not be fully aware of this. We have a deep inner desire to live the mercy of God. The mercy is the love of God that He gives off free. It is the expression how He looks at his beloved children, whom He has created to his own image, without citing our sins again and again. In His mercy we can rediscover His infinite love and also we can rediscover, who we are, as human beings, as Christians, and as Secular Franciscans.

“We need constantly to contemplate the mystery of mercy. It is a wellspring of joy, serenity, and peace. Our salvation depends on it. Mercy: the word reveals the very mystery of the Most Holy Trinity. Mercy: the ultimate and supreme act by which God comes to meet us. Mercy: the fundamental law that dwells in the heart of every person who looks sincerely into the eyes of his brothers and sisters on the path of life. Mercy: the bridge that connects God and man, opening our hearts to the hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness.”¹

Therefore, we have “to rediscover the richness encompassed by the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. The experience of mercy, indeed, becomes visible in the witness of concrete signs as Jesus himself taught us. Each time that one of the faithful personally performs one or more of these actions, he or she shall surely obtain the Jubilee Indulgence. Hence the commitment to live by mercy so as to obtain the grace of complete and exhaustive forgiveness by the power of the love of the Father who excludes no one. The Jubilee Indulgence is thus full, the fruit of the very event which is to be celebrated and experienced with faith, hope and charity.”²

We need the divine mercy to open our eyes, to open our ears, to open our hearts, so that we may experience the goodness of the Lord, who invites us to be merciful, too. Our vocation is to become holy, as our heavenly Father is holy indeed. This means, that we have to be merciful, too, as our heavenly father is merciful.

¹ Misericordiae Vultus, 2.

² Letter of Pope Francis to Archbishop Rino Fisichella, September 1st, 2015.

The Holy Year of Mercy is a privileged moment also for us to ask the Lord of hosts, to show mercy on us all, to help us in daily conversion, as a base of all of us to become builders of the kingdom of God, and to change the heart of the leaders of the nations, so that they may lead the nations in a better world, respecting the human rights and the religious freedom, taking care of the creation, and seeking the good of all. We, Secular Franciscans have to commit ourselves in the various areas of public life³, to pay attention to the appropriate use of goods and of the care of the creation. Each one of us has to find out, where and how are we called to give our contribution to the work for building a better world, trusting in the presence of the divine seed in everyone and in the transforming power of love and pardon.⁴

I invite you to pray for those who specially need the divine mercy.

I invite you all to pray for the poor, for the marginalized, who hardly have any material goods, but very often have an immense richness of spiritual goods, and can teach us how close we could get to God through the divine providence.

I invite you to pray for all who have been victims of violence, all over the world, regardless how much it has been published or how many have been concerned.

I invite you to pray for those who have sinned and have not yet started their journey of conversion.

I invite you to pray for those who are serving among us: in the Church, in the society, in our fraternities. May the mercy of God enlighten them and guide them, so that they will always seek the will of God.

Finally I invite you to pray that we all may see what we ought to do, individually and also in our fraternities, “together with all people of good will, ...*being*... called to build a more fraternal and evangelical world so that the kingdom of God may be brought about more effectively.”⁵

In line with this, I'd like to call your attention to some important points.

The Franciscans International, an international NGO of the Franciscan Family, has issued a booklet with the title “*Making human rights work for people living in extreme poverty*”.⁶ The booklet is aimed to help those working in this area, creating a new approach as the extreme poverty is a violence against the human rights. We strongly recommend this booklet to all of you to read it and study it, particularly those directly committed in this area of social work.

This publication invites us to strengthen our commitment to the solidarity with the minor, with the poorest, with the outcast, with the marginalized. We have to be much more sensitive for the suffering of those in need, both inside and outside our fraternities. We have to be more attentive to the needs of our sisters and brothers, who are living the same charism, the same vocation, in the same fraternity of the OFS either in the local fraternity or on any other of its levels. We cannot call each other sisters and brothers if we can pass by without a prayer and without a very concrete act of fraternal love! This would not only mean the lack of fraternal spirit but would also express the lack of personal commitment to our Secular Franciscan vocation, that is a gift of God. Our vocation is a treasure, and we can keep and safeguard this treasure only if we share it, if we make it visible, and if we give a strong personal testimony. God has not given it to hide it but to use it, and to make his goodness visible.

Furthermore, we have to extend our solidarity to our neighbors: those who are most close to us as a sign of the divine love of the Lord, who always invites us to make good to all, but particularly to the poorest, the weakest, the smallest. We have to open our ears and eyes, open our hearts, and then

3 OFS Rule 15.

4 OFS Rule 19.

5 OFS Rule 14.

6 <http://franciscansinternational.org/handbook/>

open our doors, kitchens, homes and also our purses.

Particularly during this Holy year of Mercy, we have to focus on concrete acts of solidarity. As Francis did, we have to pray without delay for those who need our prayers, helping at the same time those who are in greater need than we are.

Our solidarity can be expressed in a more organized way as well. For this reason the Presidency has decided to elaborate some guidelines regarding the fraternal accompaniment between national fraternities, both constituted and emerging. May these guidelines, that will be distributed next year, strengthen the fraternal bonds between the different national fraternities, and also help establish personal fraternal contacts.

By way of this Circular, I would also like to inform you, that the Presidency, after the General Elective Chapter in November 2014, Assisi, has started a very intensive work. In order to be more effective, and to be able to be closer to our sisters and brothers, the following commissions have been established inside the Presidency:

- Formation Commission, coordinated by Ana Maria Raffo Laos
- Family Commission, coordinated by Silvia Diana
- YouFra Commission, coordinated by Andrea Odak, and Ana Fruk as fraternal animator
- Communications Commission, coordinated by Michel Janian
- Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Commission, coordinated by Attilio Galimberti
- Economic Commission, coordinated by Augustine Youghak Yoon
- Juridical and Patrimonial Commission, coordinated by Tibor Kauser
- Commission for the Cause of Saints, coordinated by Francesco Mattiocco

In addition, various projects have been continued or launched, under the coordination of some of the Presidency members. I strongly hope that through the personal contacts that will be strengthened among National Councils and the Presidency through the international councilors and the presidency councilors, a fruitful collaboration will be experienced. All the members of the Presidency are convinced that we are ministers who are being elected to serve all of you, in a way that is determined by our Rule, General Constitutions, and the particular Statutes, and can be experienced by our prayerful individual and fraternal life, and by seeking the will of God who is merciful.

Let us all pray for being an instrument of the Lord, so that through our personal testimony of our Secular Franciscan vocation and through our active presence in the world, He may spread, particularly during this Holy Year, his divine mercy to everyone. May the Blessed Holy Virgin Mary, our Seraphic Father St. Francis, and our holy patrons St. Elisabeth of Hungary and St. Louis IX be our intercessors.

Your brother and minister



Tibor Kauser
CIOFS Minister General