

# JTRACES



**Brazil, Japan, Kazakhstan, France, and many other stories elsewhere... exploring a gesture that educates us to “the law of existence” and that can make the Pope’s gaze our own.**

# LONGING TO LEARN HIS GAZE

*This issue's editorial is the letter written by Fr. Julián Carrón to Communion and Liberation after the audience with Pope Francis on April 14<sup>th</sup>, and one year after the meeting with the Movement in St. Peter's square.*

**D**ear friends: As you know, on April 14<sup>th</sup> I had the grace of Pope Francis receiving me in an audience, one year after the meeting with him in St. Peter's Square that is still fresh in all of our memories.

As I traveled to Rome, I was overwhelmingly moved as I read the post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, through which the Holy Father once again offered us precious documentation of his gaze on our struggles and wounds, and those of our human brothers and sisters, in this case of families, in the light of the joyful love that has reached us through Christ.

The Holy Father is well aware of the faithfulness with which we follow him and the Holy See, and for this—to my great surprise—he thanked me right away, at the beginning of our conversation.

The audience was first and foremost an opportunity to express all of my and our gratitude for the untiring insistence with which he witnesses to us the care, full of mercy for humanity and for the world, which springs forth from faith in Christ. I conveyed to him with joyful conviction that all of us, myself first of all, want to learn his way of looking at man and at reality more and more; I assured him that I never tire of proposing it to you, my friends, each time that we meet.

I told Pope Francis that his tender and fervently interested embrace of the life of every single person, meeting them in the concreteness of their circumstances, is especially visible—both through the actions that everyone has noticed, and through the Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*. I informed him that I had invited the regional leaders of the Movement to immerse themselves in reading the document, to enter as much as possible into this gaze, so that, more and more, it may be our gaze in our relationships with friends and all those we meet. I'll take advantage of the opportunity with this letter to extend that invitation to all of you. In the future, we will find ways to help each other to enter into the richness of the document together.

During the meeting, I was able to describe where we are along the shared journey of the experience of the Movement throughout the world, about our direction and the difficulties. I was happy to find the Pope was well-informed about the path we have set upon over the last few years. You can imagine how much I—aware of the ultimate responsibility entrusted to me in the communal leadership of all of you—felt comforted by the Pope's encouragement to continue without hesitation along the road of going deeper in the charism that we have received from Fr. Giussani. As I left the audience, I found myself

full of wonder at having more clearly perceived the profound consonance between Pope Francis and Fr. Giussani. Thus, I don't think there's anything that can help us more than constantly striving to identify with the witness that Pope Francis offers us each day.

I found this consonance expressed in the following words from Fr. Giussani, which are truly freeing and have been the dominant theme of my days lately. I offer them to you as well, in case they may be of help in living the supreme responsibility of witness that Pope Francis and the Church expect from our Fraternity, which means from each one of us: "The Christ Event is the true source of the critical attitude, since it does not mean finding the limitations of things, but discovering their value. [...] It is the Event of Christ that creates the new culture and gives rise to true criticism. Valuing the good in all things, however little or however much, commits us to create a new civilization, to love a new construction. Thus a new culture is born, as the bond uniting all the fragments of good that are found, in striving to give them importance and to make them work. You stress the positive, despite its limitations, and you leave the rest to the Father's mercy" (*Generating Traces in the History of the World*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal 2010, p. 117).

Let us not forget to pray each day for Pope Francis—who is truly a gift from God to His Church—in these times of monumental changes, as he is always asking everyone he meets to do, because of the awareness he has of his own need. May this prayer also become for us a reminder to recognize what is lacking in us during this Holy Year of Mercy.

Your friend in the thrilling adventure of faith,

**Fr. Julián Carrón**

## POPE FRANCIS **AMORIS LAETITIA**

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Passages from the presentation by the Archbishop of Vienna Christoph Schönborn, which the Pope suggested to keep in mind while reading the Apostolic Exhortation.



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## AN UNEXPECTED STORM IN THE PARK

 Dear Fr. Carrón: like every other day, I found myself in the small park near our house with my two children and a friend with her children. The day seemed beautiful, but as often happens here in Dublin, suddenly a thunderstorm came, and so I proposed that we take refuge in the church that we could see from the park. I often go to this large and light-filled church with my children. I like to go with them because I want it to become as familiar a place to them as it is for me. My friend looked at me bewildered and asked, “In church? I haven’t been since my First Communion. Can children go in?” I told her that the alternative would be the rain, so we went in. Her four-year-old son, who is not baptized and who had never been in a church, asked me, “Whose house is this that is so big?” He also asked who those people on the walls were (the statues), why there were candles, why there was a tub with water, why there was a drawing of a fish on the big table, and finally who was *that one hung up* (the crucifix). With help from my daughter (who also is four), I tried to explain everything in a simple way. The more I answered, the more I was aware that my friend became more and more silent, until she said, “Listen, I have to tell you something. It is no accident that we are here. Last week, my son took a very bad fall, but after crying for a long time, he was as good as new! I was really frightened. My mother, who was with me, told




me to light a candle to Our Lady right away. I went into the church, and went to Mary and said to her, ‘Listen, I don’t know if you exist or not, but if you do, I thank you for what you did for my son.’ I went away without lighting a candle because I discovered I didn’t have any money. Now I’m in church with you. Could you bring me to light a candle?” I brought her before the altar and together with the children, we lit a candle. At home, after this afternoon of play like thousands of others, instead of throwing myself on the couch to watch TV, I treated my children differently, I cooked a nice meal for my husband, and I stopped for a moment to reflect on what had happened. What had happened? I saw in action what the Pope had said during the vigil for the Jubilee of Divine Mercy. “The path that the Risen Master shows us is a one-way street, it goes in only one direction: this means that we must move beyond ourselves to witness to the healing power of love that has conquered us. We see before us a humanity that is often wounded and fearful, a humanity that bears the scars of pain and un-

certainty. Before the anguished cry for mercy and peace, we hear Jesus’ inspiring invitation: ‘As the Father has sent me, even so I send you.’” My friend needed to find Someone to thank, even if she didn’t know who. The people I meet, in the playground, the supermarket, have a desire for a person who is interested in them, and the need for infinite Mercy. What I take for granted, what almost no longer amazes me, is for the normal people around me a dream, something desirable but not thought of as possible.

**Agata, Dublin (Ireland)**

## THOSE EIGHT HOURS TOGETHER WITH OUR SON

 A month ago, Giacomo was born with anencephaly. The days before his birth I felt real fear and anxiety. I had waited nine months for this moment, trusting and confiding in the Lord, but I was not ready to let go of this baby. As soon as he was born, my husband baptized him while he was still in the arms of the Muslim doctor who had attended his birth, who had told us so many times that we should abort the child, or go to Italy for his birth. As soon as I took the baby in my arms, I felt an immense joy. That child, who was so malformed, was an immense gift to us. We had loved him and waited for him for so many months as we had for our daughters. He received Confirmation from Fr. Andrea, who had come from Italy for this. Our baby met his three sisters, his grandparents, his aunt and so many friends who came from Italy for his



## AT WORK

### BLESSING OF THE OFFICE

**D**ue to a series of accidents and illnesses of my colleagues, I suggested, as a joke, to the owner of my company, that the company could use a round of holy water, because maybe we are forgetting God. He took me seriously and told me, “You find the priest.” I asked my friend, Father Marco, and he accepted. Saturday afternoon came, we toured the company property, than we ate dinner with the boss and two other employees and their families. A beautiful and simple evening, spent among laughs, stories and questions. Everyone was happy and impressed by Father Marco and his humanity. Monday morning, the colleague of mine who was at the dinner called me to say, “I did something that never happened to me before. Sunday I was at work, and I knew that at eleven o’clock, Father Marco would celebrate Mass. I changed my clothes and I went to church because I wanted to see him again. I stopped to say hello and then I returned to work.” After a few minutes, his wife called me and said, “I thank you for the dinner. I held back my tears, but I was moved to see a man like that; I let my tears fall the following day when I saw him at Mass.” This event makes me live today what happened to the Apostles, in the same way and with the same need. This is what I need, I need an encounter.



**Beppe, Italy**

birth and to keep us company. He also met Sr. Rachele, the Combonian nun who helped us so much during these months. I saw the Muslim doctor look at us as if she finally understood why we insisted on having this baby, and on having him here in Dubai, where we have lived for five years. She understood that for us Giacomo mattered, for us he was a person, a baby like the others, and that we wanted to give him everything, as all parents do. We could see that she was amazed and perhaps even moved. Before she left she gave me a kiss (she, who barely would ask me how I was during my check-ups), and she hugged Sr. Rachele (who was there the entire day), asking that she pray

for her. When everyone had left, my husband and I were alone with Giacomo. In that moment, I experienced a peace that I had never felt in my life, evidently given to us by the Lord, because it is not humanly possible for a mother to be at peace in front of her dying baby. I cannot say that there was no pain, because there was a lot (and even now, the struggle of not having him here is great). Every mother’s desire is to see her children grow. But truly, for so many months we had believed and trusted in the Lord and He filled us with Grace in those eight hours with Giacomo. The funeral Mass was beautiful: Fr. Roberto was there with some friends from our small Dubai community, along with

many acquaintances and friends from here (my husband’s colleagues, mothers from our daughters’ school, “new friends”), many of whom are Muslim. We were not expecting this and we were grateful for and moved by this sharing of our pain, and for how the life of this child had touched so many people. There I understood why the Lord had wanted us in Dubai. In that moment (and in these months), in a silent way, we had been witnesses to the presence of Christ in our life. We lived and demonstrated the certainty that Jesus has overcome death, that without the certainty of the Resurrection, life would only be desperate.

**Silvia, Dubai (Arab Emirates)**

A man in a blue long-sleeved shirt and a black quilted vest is kneeling on a dark floor. He is looking down and to the right, with his hands held out in a gesture of offering or receiving. In the foreground, the legs and feet of another person wearing green pants and white sneakers are visible, lying on the floor. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

# “I HAVEN'T GIVEN: I'VE RECEIVED”

From the periphery of Milan in the 1950s to today: the experience of **CHARITABLE WORK** involves thousands of people, from Brazil to Kazakhstan, from poor neighborhoods to prisons, each learning “the law of life” and how concrete God’s tenderness is.

BY PAOLA BERGAMINI



**“B**etween late 1957 and early 1958, the young men and women of *Gioventù Studentesca* [Student Youth] in Italy began weekly trips to the Bassa, a vast rural area in the southern part of Milan. This impressive gesture every Sunday involved hundreds of high school students,” Alberto Savorana writes in his *Life of Fr. Giussani*, recounting the beginning of GS. A black and white photo of those years shows those young people, some in jacket and loafers, playing with the children from the farm complex. The shot captures the concentrated and glad faces of the students and the children. The volunteers did not solve the numerous problems of those kids, but they shared their lives. Fr. Giussani said, “The need to care for others is so original, so natural that it is in us even before we are aware of it, and we call it a law of existence. Living is sharing life. The law of life is charity.” This is the origin of charitable work: a gesture that throws our heart open to living with fullness.

“Since then, thousands of people in Italy and abroad have been taught that law of existence is gratuitousness; an imitation of Christ,” continues the biography of Fr. Giussani. Today on the Internet, the images from every corner of the earth show the same need to share life with the same gladness. They no longer feature those farms, but parish youth centers, senior care facilities, after-school programs, prisons, soup kitchens, and many other such places.

Over fifty years later, why is this gesture still fundamental? Or better, what do people discover in doing charitable work that makes them feel they “cannot live without it”? What can we learn from this in the Year of Mercy?

We would like to recount this surprise through some simple experiences, making the tenderness of God >>

## CLOSE UP

» concrete for people in their teens, twenties, and seventies. The face of Mercy shines upon our life, “comes to us as closeness and tenderness, and because of this, comes also as *compassion* and *solidarity*, as *consolation* and *forgiveness*.... It is something which burns within our hearts, driving us to love,” as Pope Francis himself said recently, at the Jubilee of Divine Mercy prayer vigil.

**THE STARRY SKY.** It was seven in the evening, in Florence’s Piazza della Libertà. Michela approached a homeless man who was looking for shelter from the intense cold, and asked him, “How are you?” The man, coughing heavily, said, “Very well. How often do you get to see such a starry sky!” Michela looked up, and saw the sky full of stars. “In the midst of all that squalor, he told me to look at something beautiful that I hadn’t even noticed.” Every two weeks, Michela, a third-year nursing student, goes with fifteen of her university friends to assist the Saint Egidio Community in their work with the homeless. They assemble bags with dinner—chicken, pasta, a bottle of water—and, in two shifts, bring them to the homeless who “hang out” in a few regular places, or in the streets and squares of the city. Francesca recounts, “They always have a lot of questions. They want to know who you are, what you do. They’re curious about you. You get the impression that they’re more interested in you than in the bag of food. The friends of the community repeatedly remind us to remember their names, because for these people, being recognized is important. You see everything in them: happiness over a triviality, and desperation and tears over a stolen piece of cardboard they needed for the night. You see the emotions you experience, but for the slightest things.” On Giulio’s first time, he peeled twelve pounds of onions. “You follow what they tell you to do.”



**YESTERDAY AND TODAY.** In the previous page and here, University Students from Florence help homeless people. Right, charitable work in the Milanese “Bassa,” in the Fifties.



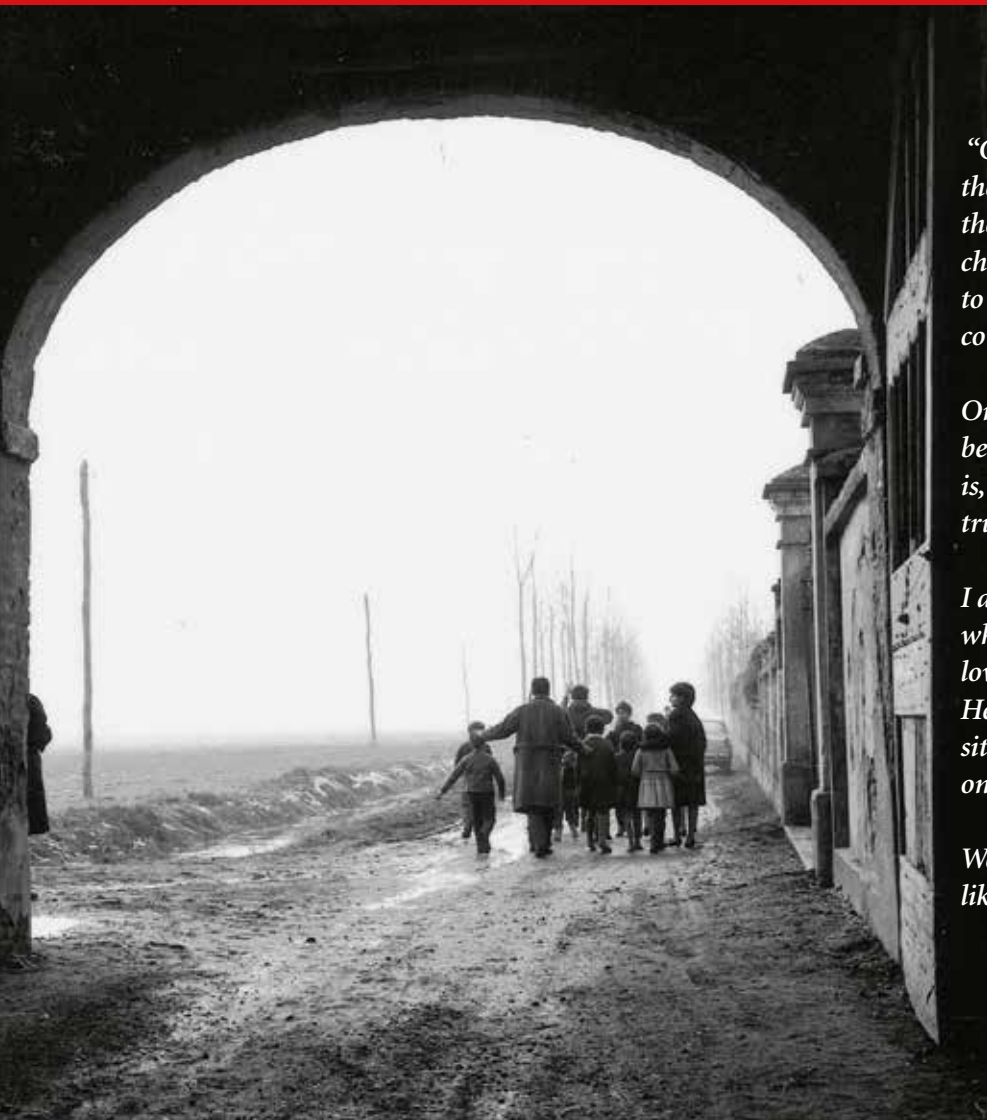
One evening he met a young man. “He was so happy, and I didn’t understand why, and asked him. He said, ‘Every day I have to deal with the cold, the hunger, the beatings, and when I fall asleep I hope I’ll see the next day. And then I wake up—and I exist.’ He was wearing a thin sweater and I was nice and warm in my jacket. I thought, how many times do I wake up with this promise? You can’t take anything for granted. You are grateful for what you are. That evening changed even the way I say goodbye to my girlfriend, the usual ‘see you tomorrow.’”

On the other side of the world, in Hiroshima (Japan), every Wednesday, seventy-year-old Sako and around thirty others bring bread and soup to the homeless. It all began twenty years ago, at the suggestion of a PIME priest. Sako had no intention of getting involved, but Fr. Ambrogio

Pisoni, a friend, told her in those days, “Charitable work is a gesture that teaches gratuitousness. Do you do it?” His words had sparked her interest. “I began, and I’ve never stopped.” It is difficult to enter into a relationship with these people. At times it takes years to get just monosyllabic answers to simple questions like, “How’s it going?” They are not looking for a relationship. So what makes her return every Wednesday? “Remaining faithful to this gesture, which can seem sterile in terms of purely human calculation, continually shows me the reason I do it: pure gratuitousness. This is what I learn every Wednesday.”

“Why in the world do you do it? Go have fun, that would be better.” This was the cynical comment that a prison guard made as Nicola entered the Ferrara penitentiary. At the invitation of the prison chaplain, every oth-





*“Christ has enabled us to understand the ultimate reason for this, revealing the ultimate law of being and of life: charity. The supreme law of our being is to share in the being of others, to live in communion.*

*Only Jesus Christ reveals this to us, because He knows what everything truly is, who God, from whom we are born, truly is; what Being truly is.*

*I am able to understand the word ‘charity’ when I remember that the Son of God, loving us, did not send us His riches (as He was able to do) and revolutionize our situation; instead He became poor like one of us: He ‘shared’ our nothingness.*

*We do ‘charitable work’ in order to live like Christ.”*

**Luigi Giussani**

(from *The Meaning of Charitable Work*)

er Saturday he and some university friends teach the hymns for Sunday Mass. There are about ten prisoners, many of them foreigners. Between one song and another, they talk, discuss their lives, and ask questions. The first time Nicola was a bit frightened. “Then, you realize that they don’t look like criminals. They are men like you. But I received a gift that enables me not to get lost.” For two years, they did the *Way of the Cross* with detainees who collaborated with the state in mafia cases, and who live in a separate section of the prison, isolated from the other prisoners. In the end, one of them expressed his thanks for “someone who remembers us.” Marco thought, “I too need to be loved so gratuitously. I need someone who remembers me.” When these men sing, they throw themselves into it, sometimes harshly, as if they were at

a soccer stadium. For Vincenzo, who has a Conservatory degree in piano, the study of music was the search for perfection, “but then, spending time with them, I realized that this isn’t enough. They taught me to go to the essential thing in music. Their ‘shouting’ tore down my technically perfect castles. In the end, I was the one who got the most out of the experience.”

**A MILLION DOLLARS.** Inside prison, the value of time changes radically. It is something that never passes and at the same time, is emptied of its content. “For those who are interested, there are copies of *Traces* on the table in the back of the room.” When Silvio said this, the prisoners applauded and one of them yelled, “Hooray!” Almost a standing ovation. For three years now, a small group of the community has gone monthly to the Fleury-

Mérogis Prison, on the periphery of Paris, to help prepare the songs for Mass. They are only allowed to spend a few minutes before and after the celebration with the prisoners, some of whom are awaiting trial, and maybe gone the next month. At a certain point it was natural to ask, “With so little time, how can we ‘be ourselves’? How can we share our life and their life, going to the essential, to the thing that even behind bars makes it worthwhile to get up in the morning?”

They find the answer in *Traces*. Every month the visitors bring copies of the magazine, even from previous years, in five languages. The brief time they have together grows and is filled with questions, prompted by what strikes the prisoners: a title or a cover photo. Silvio recounts, “Just think, in that place one can read ‘Page One,’ the letters, the editorial, all >>

» the richness that life has. It changes me first of all. It is an opportunity to see that the desire for the infinite is not 'locked-up' behind the prison bars." Some prisoners even ask, "Can I take a few extra copies? I want to give it to my cellmate, who couldn't come to Mass."

For Andrea, an AVSI director in Nairobi, Kenya, it seemed that his work, the many things to organize, the "important commitments" left no time for charitable work. But "since everyone was doing it," at a certain point he felt almost obliged to follow his friends who went to help the sisters of Mother Teresa of Calcutta's center for the disabled. For a while, he limited himself to peeling potatoes and cleaning. Then one day he stopped to watch a sister who, with infinite patience, was feeding a boy with deformed arms and legs. Andrea could neither stay there on the threshold nor leave; he approached, took the bowl and began feeding him. The sister whispered, "He's blind, so caress him so that he feels you are there." Andrea delicately brushed his face. "At that moment I thought that he was there for me, to remind me of Jesus."

That day Andrea returned home with a new gladness, one he had never felt before. Now he knows why the friends in the community, who have nothing, get up at five in the morning one Saturday a month and travel two hours to spend time with those people. The writer Bruce Chatwin, seeing Mother Teresa kiss a leper, said, "I wouldn't do that for a million dollars." She replied, "I wouldn't do it either for a million dollars." Only for Jesus.

The "Bassa" of the late 1950s has not disappeared. It lives on today in the poor neighborhoods of the cities where young people, as then, give of themselves seriously and completely.

This happens, for example, in Cagliari, Sardinia, where every Sunday at 7:45 Mariella calls together



**MUSIC BEHIND BARS.** Charitable work in Ferrara prison, where University Students teach inmates the songs for the Mass. In this page, one Way of the Cross in the penitentiary.

the kids. "Is everybody here? Come on, the bus is leaving." At 8:20 they are in Sant'Elia, a poor neighborhood of the city. Since January, the GS high-schoolers have been helping the sisters of Mother Teresa's congregation with the children of the area. "There they are! They're back!" a boy cries as soon as he sees them get off the bus. They had been waiting for them. Alex goes to get Francesco, who is autistic, but nonetheless gladly spends time with his new friend. As soon as Maria sees Fatima in her wheelchair, she goes to her and says, "Today I'm with you. I'll push you." The others move through the streets, knocking on the doors to call the kids.

Every Sunday the number of children who gather with the group grows, and a few mothers have begun getting involved as well. They walk through the neighborhood singing before arriving at the parish youth center. Giuseppe pulls out a sheet with notes for the games they have thought up during the week. "Now we'll divide you into two groups." They play intensely until time for Mass, and then everyone heads to the church, which the parishioners have never seen so full. At lunch time, everyone goes

home. Saying goodbye, one of them tells Marinella, "I'm happy! I'm more myself. I don't know how to explain it. I didn't give anything, but I learned something for myself."

**AN X-RAY.** Something you receive freely and cannot keep for yourself. In a parish in Reggio Calabria, for five years now, a group of university students in CL have been teaching catechism to elementary and middle school kids. On Sunday mornings they run games at the parish youth center, "so afterwards everyone will come to Mass." It was Fr. Pietro Sergi's idea. Lorena was a middle school student when she met the Movement through Fr. Pietro. She recounts, "Teaching catechism is like giving back the embrace, the gaze that I received, and that I can't keep just for myself." It was a fascinating discovery for her, to the point that she decided, "This is what I want to do with my life." In fact, she put her Architecture degree aside and has begun studying for a degree in Education.

The kids x-ray what you say and how you act with them. "If they perceive you're just spouting words, they drop you like a hot potato. You have to be fully engaged. This is always a »



## THE MOST BEAUTIFUL ASPECT OF OUR FRIENDSHIP

**Some atheist students were struck by their teacher, and wanted to learn about “the pillars” of the Movement. And so they cooked for the homeless of São Paulo.**

by Alessandra Stoppa

**T**he road of the Movement has three pillars.” This was how Alexandre responded to the thirst of some students who had sought him out simply because they had seen his lessons at the Medical School of the University of São Paulo, where he teaches. This was more or less a year ago. A student had stopped him and said, “I want to stay with you.” Shortly after, two others (atheists and liberal, like the first) confided in him their desire to become “more human physicians, like you. Is it something innate or can it be learned?”

Slowly, a friendship began, full of the desire to know more. Faith was the last thing on their minds. Then, one evening Alexandre told them about the Movement. The next day, they looked up “Communion and Liberation” on the Internet and went back to him. “We want to do School of Community.” Then, “We also want

to give to the Common Fund, because we read that it’s important.”

So, out of the three pillars, only one was missing: charitable work. The students pushed to begin, so Alexandre told them, “You choose what to do. The important thing is to be faithful to it.” They put their heads together and came up with the possibility of helping sick elderly people at a home, thinking that this kind of service would be interesting for their studies. They talked about it for months. Alexandre sensed they were uneasy about it, but they were the ones to identify the problem. “Our idea isn’t good,” they told him. “It’s a social project based on our own self-interest. Charitable work is to learn gratuitousness. We have to keep looking.” He followed them, as he has been doing since he met them. They gave themselves some more time. “In June we came upon the need of a very elderly parish

priest who had been preparing dinner for the homeless for thirty years.” This parish was only a few minutes from the university, in an upscale area of town where few people go, though, because of the “uncomfortable” presence of those guests: the homeless, mentally ill, unemployed, and immigrants.

Alexandre and the students, who numbered three a year before and now were about fifteen, began their charitable work this way, helping to prepare about one hundred and fifty meals at a time. Time and gestures are really practical: peeling pounds of potatoes and carrots, working at the stove, setting the tables, serving, cleaning, and cleaning some more.

**Twenty-two-year-old Riccardo** was among the first to desire charitable work. “We were told that it was necessary in order to learn gratuitousness.” He did not need to know anything else, and even now, does not add many words, saying that it is too early. “You need time to understand.” But he has already made one discovery that has shattered his former ideas. “We do not know our own nature. We are made to help others, to give ourselves.” “It is the most beautiful aspect of our friendship,” says Alexandre. “Serving together makes something happen among us. It deepens the sense of belonging.” He discovered this seeing one of them, apparently the most distant, cleaning the floor and singing *Povera Voce*. He also discovered it in himself. “I always did charitable work because I was following the university students. But I did it for them, so that they would do it. Now I need it for myself.”

One Saturday, Alexandre had to skip going to charitable work because of an important commitment. “A justified absence, certainly,” he says. But he heard that one of the students went another evening because he had missed once. Alexandre followed his example in order to learn the same gusto. He recounts, “This year, I realized two things: that God is more mysterious than I had thought, and that my ‘I’ is more mysterious than I had imagined. So many problems in life have this origin, the failure to understand these two mysterious facts.”

*“To freely go to others, to share a little of their life and to put in common a little of ours, enables us to discover a sublime and mysterious thing (one understands doing it).”*

*It is the discovery of the fact that precisely because we love them, it is not we who make them happy; and that not even the most perfect society, the most legally solid organism, the greatest riches, the surest health, the purest beauty, the most educated civilization will ever be able to make them happy.*

*It is Another who can make them happy. Who is the reason for everything? Who made everything? God.*

*So Jesus is not only He who announces to me the truest word, who explains the law of my reality, He is no longer only the light of my mind; I discover that Christ is the meaning of my life.”*

**Luigi Giussani**

(from *The Meaning of Charitable Work*)



**FREE TIME.** Above, charitable work in Cagliari: GS teenagers help the sisters of Mother Teresa with the children of a poor neighborhood. Below, a parish youth center in Reggio Calabria.



» real challenge,” explains Martina. There certainly is no lack of creativity. During a gathering, Marco had them watch two videos: one on the creation and another of kids playing. When the lights came back on, 11-year-old Francesca, a girl who can never hold still, came up to Martina and told her, “I understood that we are the most marvelous thing in the world.” A wonder that spreads from person to person, because responding to the need of the other generates an unexpected unity.

The cell phone vibrated. Giulia, a 22-year-old university student, looked at the screen: unknown number. She thought: “It’s her.” She meant Ada, a colleague of her mother’s who, the day before, came to the office in desperate tears because of a family

tragedy. Her mother could say, “I’ll give you my daughter’s number. Call her and go where she goes.” That evening, telling Giulia about it, her mother explained, “Some time back, Ada told me that she wanted to help children. I told her about the children you and your friends help with their homework in the afternoons, with the Sisters of Charity in Via Martinengo. This is why I told her to call you. You can help her, the way you helped me.” Giulia answered the call, and they made plans to meet at lunch and then do charitable work together.

**TWICE.** In the subway before Corvetto in the southern periphery of Milan, Ada told Giulia, “I know that these kids are somewhat difficult. I hope I

can manage. You know, I’m always so insecure.” “Don’t worry. Today you’ll be by my side.” At the end of that afternoon, Giulia asked Ada whether she wanted to return. Ada replied, “Yes. I’m a bit unsure whether to stay with the middle school kids or go with the elementary school children.” The following week, they were together again, but this time, after a few minutes, Ada took the situation in hand and jumped into the explanations. On the way home, Giulia asked, “Have you decided which age group you prefer?” “Well, you know, I’d like to go twice, with the elementary school children and also with the middle school kids.” A few days later, Giulia’s mother told her, “Ada seems born again. Her smile has come back.” **T**



Gianna (the second from right) and her friends.

## A CHARITABLE WORK CALLED "GIANNA"

Every week for years, a group of friends visited Gianna in the psychiatric institute of Karaganda. "It turned out that we were the ones who were the objects of her tenderness."

by Anna Leonardi

In Russian, charitable work is "charitable work." In fact, no adequate term has been found to translate an experience of the kind. However, in Karaganda, in the heart of Kazakhstan, there is a word that illuminates and almost substitutes this foreign expression. It is the name of a woman: Gianna. Here, charitable work began for her. For the last seven years, every week, a group of friends has gone to the psychiatric institute of the city where she had been committed, to visit her and bring her clothes, food, books and music. It is a place of squalor that evokes the memories of the Soviet gulags, of which this Kazakh land still bears the scars.

"Some of us met Gianna at the end of the 1990s in the university. She suffered from epilepsy and a light form of schizophrenia," recounts Liubov. "But she was able to live an almost normal life." Her sister was the one to forcibly institutionalize her after the death of their parents. All of a sudden, her friends did not know where she was. Fr. Edoardo and Fr. Adelio, her Italian teachers, finally found her, after a month of searching. "She

was bound, sedated, with her head shaved," recounts Fr. Edo. "She had tried to escape and to commit suicide. In the midst of that horror we repeated what we told her when she converted and asked to be baptized: "We will never abandon you."

Charitable work grew out of that promise, that bond, to which the friends of Karaganda decided to dedicate themselves in a stable way.

**They organized themselves** into groups, and on Saturday mornings, with simplicity, did what Gianna needed, challenging her lethargy and insecurity. Visit after visit, relatives, students and colleagues came together, and something began to revive in Gianna. "She opened up, looked forward to our coming, wanted to know what had happened since our last visit, worried if someone didn't show up for too long. The situation seemed to invert, and it turned out that we were the ones who were the objects of her tenderness," explains Liubov. The nurses took a liking to her and the charitable work friends found her helping to distribute medication in

the wards. She no longer looked at the other patients in the same way, no longer called them "idiots," but instead spent time with them. She even took care of a man suffering from cancer. He had a large bleeding growth that she cleaned and treated every day, using her best clothes when the bandages proved to be too small. "I know that I won't save him," she told a friend, "but I want him to go to Jesus with the dignity of a man." And so it was. She was holding his hand when he died.

**Natasha, another patient,** saw that little group praying together before saying goodbye, and one day asked if she could join in. She and Gianna began reciting Morning Prayer together. "Here you can pass time as if time didn't exist," Gianna told Enrico, another friend who came for charitable work. "The presence of Natasha is the spark that rekindles the desire to continue the journey, even in an insane asylum."

In the last year, Natasha and Gianna began working on the Russian translation of the book by Giovanna Parravicini: *Liberi* [Free]. Their charitable work often evolved into intense discussions, looking for the most appropriate expressions.

Last autumn Gianna asked Fr. Adelio, the Bishop of Karaganda, to receive Confirmation. "Every time we spoke about it, she repeated that Confirmation would give her the strength to live intensely, even in those conditions," recounts Liubov. Gianna had seen a crucifix for the first time in an old French film when she was a child, and had asked her grandparents who that man on the cross was. They spoke to her about Jesus. "But then," she said, "it was years before I understood that a God who shares all our humanity is not a fairy tale." Shortly before her Confirmation, her health worsened. The morning of January 5<sup>th</sup>, friends were informed that Gianna had died. The last time they had met, Enrico had asked her, "Here, where everything is ugly, how do you manage to be so beautiful?" With her special smile that made her eyes close, she answered, "If a person lives in the hands of the Mystery, then you see that beauty."



# BEYOND THE BARBED WIRE



**The last few months, the spotlight has been on Lesbos and the refugees in Greece. But what's happening on the other side of the border, in **MACEDONIA**? The surprising mobilization of the small Catholic community. Hidden from the eyes of the world, that “greatest gift” the Pope talked about is being offered.**

BY ALESSANDRA STOPPA

Francis' visit to the island of Lesbos is destined to be one of the images that summarize his pontificate. That day was all-important; the newspapers described it as a “prophetic” gesture, both for how it prodded the consciences of Europe and the world, and for the “living ecumenism” with the Orthodox Patriarch and Archbishop. But shining through the concreteness of what Francis said and did was another factor: the thirst he has for others, for souls.

“I have come here to be with you. We came to hear your stories.” To look them in the eyes, take their hands in his and hear their voices. Then there were the 12 Syrians he took home with him, trusting in God (“they had their papers in order”), the long, silent pauses, and his questions to better understand the children's drawings. “Don't fold them,” he said, “I want to put them on my desk.” To those who asked him to comment at the end of the day, he said, “It brings you to tears.” Just as the migrants who knelt in front of him were crying. One young man threw himself at his feet, repeating amidst >>



» his tears, “Thank God! Thank you!” asking for the Pope’s blessing.

**THE GREATEST GIFT.** As of April 16<sup>th</sup>, there were over 3,000 migrants on the island, marooned for weeks since the borders were closed, like many others in Greece and throughout the Balkans. “I want to tell you that you are not alone,” Francis reminded them. “Yes, so much more needs to be done! But let us thank God that in our suffering he never leaves us alone.” This was clear in the generosity of the Greek people who, “even though going through their own struggles, are helping the refugees,” and in all those who seek out refugees every day, just as Pope Francis has done, though the world doesn’t see them. The gift he called “the greatest gift we can offer one another [...] love,” is being offered in many places.

Over the last few months, the spotlight has been on Idomeni, a

Greek city on the northern border, and the troubled makeshift refugee camp there. Little to nothing has been said about what’s happening on the other side of the barbed wire, where the Macedonian Gevgelija camp is located. As Fr. Zoran Stojanov, a Byzantine Rite Catholic priest from the Macedonian capital, starts off saying, “Macedonia is small.” It’s not a trivial point; he’s watched as 800,000 refugees crossed through his country of 2 million inhabitants, and has witnessed the response of the even smaller Macedonian Catholic community (totaling just 15,000). Amidst the political inertia and its consequences, the priests and their flock were the first to give of themselves, welcoming and suffering with those who had started along the Balkan route. It was right around this time last year that they saw them crowding the streets, walking along highways and filing along the railroad tracks

because they “point the way” north, to Germany and other European countries.

“We opened up the parishes,” Fr. Zoran goes on to say. “We asked our faithful to be considerate of them and help them. They were the first to help these people. And this re-awakened everyone to step in and get involved.” Their initiative was, in fact, followed by the intervention of the Macedonian government and international NGOs. But the first presence was this small group of people, the Church; so much a people that of the little they had, they gave all they could—from parishes, various movements and religious orders... “We started providing help—clothing and food—as we could. But it was hard, because they were spread throughout the country.” They did the same in Gevgelija, a quiet city of 16,000, about two miles from the border with Greece, where “there are 500 Catholics,”





**AT THE BORDER.** On the left, Iraqi refugees waiting for their documents at the Gevgelija refugee transit camp. Above, Fr. Zoran Stojanov working with the volunteers distributing food.

according to Fr. Dimitar Tašev, the pastor who became the local coordinator for all the volunteers who've come to help.

Gevgelija was the site of the first refugee transit camp. "This made it easier to help them, because we knew where to find them," Fr. Zoran went on to say. From the beginning they, with the help of Caritas Macedonia and Caritas International, provided coverage at the camp 24/7. All for free. "We were helped out especially by those between the ages of 16 and 30." They divided responsibilities by the various institutions. "We took care of food and clothing, the government and NGOs took care of the rest: healthcare, electricity, and education for the children." Through February, they gave help to the daily influx of 2,500 to 3,000 people a day, with a few peak days of 8,000 to 9,000. They came to the border in all conditions, with those who needed wheelchairs being car-

ried over the rough terrain.

Since the closing of the Balkan route, only this group of Catholics and the Macedonian Red Cross have remained at Gevgelija camp. All the other organizations have left. Today, the refugees number 200 (give or take a few, depending on who has managed to get through the border or who has taken off), and there are 1,800 stuck in Kumanovo, the other Macedonian camp in the North on the Serbian border. "The facilities are much worse than at Gevgelija, but people don't want to go back," they are afraid of ending up back in Turkey and all their effort having been in vain. "Europe is being hard-hearted," said Cardinal Christoph Schönborn, Archbishop of Vi-

enna, when asked about the border issue. "Behind this loss of sensitivity towards others lies an inability to be moved, that is, to share in the suffering of these brothers and sisters. It is a loss of humanity, a new form of paganism. Ancient paganism, as Joseph Ratzinger repeated on a number of occasions, was marked by insensitivity. We need a Europe that revolves around the sacredness of the human being."

**THE SYRIAN DENTIST.** In the hospitality of the small Macedonian community, everything revolved around the sacredness of the eyes, hands and voices of thousands of strangers. They held a number of trainings to help prepare the volunteers. "The most important thing is to learn to be attentive to everything, to every word and every movement. Nothing should risk offending the dignity of the people who arrive here. They are very, very sensitive." Fr. Zoran speaks about the refugees with reverence and familiarity, despite the fact that he only sees them for a few hours and will likely never see them again. Still, he is very

grateful for their presence. "When I go home from the camp I think, 'they've done more for me than I've done for them.'"

One of the men he met was a Syrian dentist. He came with his wife and their four children. He had studied in Milan, in Italy, and had worked in a clinic in Syria with three other doctors. "He had ev-

erything, but one night five people came into his house with guns and masks. They told him, 'You'd better leave.'" Fr. Zoran thinks about that man often. "He confided in me >>

They lost their home, everything, and yet they say to him, "God is always present."



**AT THE CAMP.** Fr. Dimitar Tašev (first on the left) is the volunteer coordinator at Gevgelija camp, at the border with Greece. Through February, they gave help to the daily influx of 2,500 to 3,000 people.

» that he had never thought of leaving his country, and that if he did have to leave, he would never have come to Europe, because he didn't like it much here. The fact is, he didn't have a choice." One thought sticks with him: "I'm helping people who don't want to ask me for help. They are forced to ask. It's completely different."

**FAREWELLS AT THE STATION.** Another image is fixed in Fr. Zoran's memory. In the container that serves as an office at the camp, the volunteers were using cell phones and computers to try to find information about two young Syrian kids. The mother sat next to them, quietly composed. She's dazed by fear because she can't find them. They were lost, as often happens in the exodus of refugees. Families are split across a sea or a border or amidst the chaos that makes entire villages into slaves. Then, they got word: the kids were in Hungary, and they were all right. The woman burst into tears, and threw herself into the arms of the volunteers. "She hugged them as if they were her daughters."

The refugees come from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Libya,

and Nigeria. "The overwhelming majority are Muslim. And it's not always easy. Some don't want to say anything, or give answers that sound rehearsed. You don't know who they really are..." But when he looks at them, he sees brothers and sisters. "For us Macedonians, it's even easier," Fr. Dimitar adds. For many of them, they see in the refugees' faces the fate of their ancestors, of their grandparents and great-grandparents who were cast out of their homeland during the Balkan Wars. With this in their hearts, they clothed them, warmed them with stew and tea, watched their children being born, and wiped their tears before accompanying them to the train north to Tabanovce, a mile from the Serbian border. "You watch them board, you'll never see them again, and they, with a wide smile, shout, 'See you soon!'" Fr. Zoran says. He pauses, looking for the right words in Italian. "I feel... full. Fully satisfied."

"Any organization can give out food and clothing," Fr. Dimitar says. "We want to get to know them, to speak with them." He goes to the camp every day. When they call him at three in the morning he jumps up

and goes, and he spends hours on the phone with priests in Iraq and Syria who act as real-time translators for the refugees. "It's God who is helping; we're just instruments," he says. What causes him the most pain is seeing "Europe turned against Europe." And he's very saddened when he hears on TV that Macedonia should close its doors to the refugees ("They're closing borders all around, what can we do? People don't want to stay here, this isn't the goal.") Then he sees the media who come and only tell the story of the bad things amidst the good that is happening. His gaze is on the way people have responded. He's been in Gevgelija since 2006 and has been the first stable pastor in over 50 years. "For a long time, the Catholic community wasn't able to be close to their Macedonian priests. It was a great suffering" that makes their hearts more open and available.

**TO BE OUR OWN.** Fr. Zoran's van is ready to depart. Three times a week he loads up the volunteers from his parish and buses them to the camp. From his village of Radovo, the only entirely Catholic place in all of Macedonia ("1,385 Catholics," to be precise), it's an hour to Gevgelija. "It's not that we felt the need to respond to the situation; it's that we perceived it to be our own. I don't know how to explain it better than that." Then he adds, "I've just tried to follow the Pope. Christ is present in these people." When you see their suffering, "you forget everything," he says. Or you remember everything, which is the same. "I'm truly grateful to have met them." They are men and women forced to leave everything behind. "They lost their home, everything," he went on to say, and yet, though they have nothing, they say to him, "God is always present. Wherever we go, God is always there." **I**



# LOVE IS ABLE TO FIND THE WAY

**The most recent developments in ecclesial discussions. Trust in the nostalgia of mankind. Ending with the key concept of “discernment”: how is the conscience formed? Passages from the presentation by the Archbishop of Vienna, which the Pope suggested to keep in mind while reading the Exhortation.**

BY CHRISTOPH SCHÖNBORN

**B**efore entering into the text itself I would like to say, in a very personal way, why I read it with joy, gratitude, and with such strong emotion. In the ecclesial dialogue on marriage and the family there is often a tendency, perhaps unaware,

to discuss these realities of life on the basis of two separate tracks. On the one hand there are marriages and families that are “regular,” that correspond to the rules, where everything is “fine” and “in order,” and then there are the “irregular” situations that represent a problem.

Already the very term “irregular” suggests that such a distinction can be made very clearly.

Those, therefore, who find themselves on the side of the “irregular” families, must live with the fact that the “regular” families are on the other side. I am personally aware of >>

» how difficult it is for those who come from a “patchwork” family, due to the situation of my own family. The discussion of the Church in this regard may cause harm and can give the sense of exclusion.

Pope Francis’ Exhortation is guided by the phrase: “It is a matter of reaching out to everyone” (AL 297), as this is a fundamental understanding of the Gospel: we are all in need of mercy! “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone” (Jn 8:7). We are all, regardless



Christoph Schönborn.

of the marriage or family situation in which we find ourselves, *journeying*. Even a marriage in which everything is “going well” is a journey. It must grow, learn, and overcome new phases. It knows sin and failure, and needs reconciliation and new beginnings, even in old age (cf. AL 297).

Pope Francis has succeeded in speaking about all situations without cataloguing them, without categorizing, with that outlook of fundamental benevolence that is associated with the heart of God, with the eyes of Jesus that exclude no one (cf. AL 297), that welcome all and grants the “joy of the Gospel” to all. [...] In this climate of welcome, the discourse on the Christian vision of marriage and the family becomes an invitation, an encouragement, to the joy of love in which we can believe and which excludes no one,

**“As Christians, we can hardly stop advocating marriage simply to avoid countering contemporary sensibilities. We would be depriving the world of values that we can offer.”**



truly and sincerely no one. For me *Amoris Laetitia* is, first and foremost, a “linguistic event,” as was *Evangelii Gaudium*. Something has changed in ecclesial discussion. This change of language was already perceptible during the Synodal process. Between the two Synods of October 2014 and October 2015, we can clearly see how the tone became richer in esteem, as if the different situations in life had simply been accepted, without

being immediately judged or condemned. In *Amoris Laetitia* this tone of language continues. Previ-

ously there is obviously not only a linguistic choice, but also a profound respect when faced with each person, who is never a “problematic case” in a “category,” but rather a unique person with his or her story and journey towards God. [...]

**THIS PERVERSIVE PRINCIPLE** of “inclusion” clearly troubles some people. Does this not favor relativism? Does the frequently evoked mercy not become permissiveness? [...] To clarify this, Pope Francis leaves no doubt regarding his intentions or our task: “As Christians, we can hardly stop advocating marriage simply to avoid countering contemporary sensibilities, or out of a desire to be fashionable or a sense of helplessness in the face of human and moral failings. We would be depriving the world of values that we can and must offer... What



we need is a more responsible and generous effort to present the reasons and motivations for choosing marriage and the family, and in this way to help men and women better respond to the grace that God offers them” (AL 35).

Pope Francis is convinced that the Christian vision of marriage and the family also has an unchanged force of attraction. But it demands “a healthy dose of self-criticism.” “We also need to be humble and realistic, acknowledging that at times the way we present our Christian beliefs and treat other people has helped contribute to today’s problematic situation” (AL 36). [...]

Pope Francis speaks of a profound trust in the hearts and the nostalgia of men. He expresses this very well in his reflections on education. Here we perceive the influence of the great Jesuit tradition in

education in personal responsibility. He refers to two contrary dangers: “*laissez-faire*” and the obsession with controlling and dominating everything. On the one hand it is true that “Families cannot help but be places of support, guidance and direction... Vigilance is always necessary. Neglect is never beneficial” (AL 260).

But vigilance can also become excessive: “...What is most important is the ability lovingly to help children grow in freedom, maturity, overall discipline, and real autonomy” (AL 261). I consider this thought on educa-

tion very enlightening in connection with the pastoral practice of the Church. Indeed, precisely in this sense Pope Francis often returns to the issue of trust in the *conscience* of the faithful: “We have been called to form consciences, not to replace them” (AL 37). The great question, obviously, is this: how do we form consciences? How do we get to the key concept of this great document, the key to correctly understanding Pope Francis’ intentions: “Personal discernment,” especially in difficult and complex situations? [...] It is “discernment” that gives a person a mature character, and the Christian path should be of help in reaching this personal maturity; not forming automatons, externally conditioned and remote-controlled, but people who have matured in their friendship with Christ. Only when this personal “discernment” is mature is it also possible to arrive at “pastoral discernment,” which is important, especially in “those situations that fall short of what the Lord demands of us” (AL 6). The eighth chapter refers to this “pas-

**“What we need is a more generous effort to present the reasons for choosing marriage, and in this way to help men and women better respond to the grace that God offers them.”**

toral discernment,” a chapter likely to be of great interest not only to ecclesial public opinion, but also to the media.

I should however mention that Pope Francis has described Chapters 4 and 5 as central, [...] because of their content. “We cannot encourage a path of fidelity and mutual self-giving without encouraging the growth, strengthening, and deepening of conjugal and family love” (AL 89). These two central chapters of *Amoris La-* ➤

» *etitia* will probably be skipped by many people keen on getting to the so-called “hot potatoes,” the critical points. [...] Therefore it is unsurprising that it is largely the eighth chapter that has attracted attention and interest. Indeed, the question of how the Church treats these wounds, of how she treats the failure of love, has become for many a test to understand whether the Church is truly the place where God’s Mercy can be experienced.

**THIS CHAPTER** owes much to the intense work of the two Synods, to the extensive discussions in the arenas of public and ecclesial opinion. Here the fruitfulness of Pope Francis’ method is shown. He expressly wished for an open discussion on the pastoral accompaniment of complex situations, and has been able to fully base this on the two texts that the two Synods presented to him to show the possibility of “accompanying, discerning and integrating weakness” (AL 291).

Pope Francis explicitly makes his own the declarations that both Synods presented to him: “The Synod Fathers reached a general consensus, which I support” (AL 297). With regard to those who are divorced and civilly remarried, he states: “I am in agreement with the many Synod Fathers who observed that... the logic of integration is the key to their pastoral care... Such persons need to feel not as excommunicated members of the Church, but instead as living members, able to live and grow in the Church and

experience her as a mother who welcomes them always...” (AL 299).

But what does this mean in practice? Many rightly ask this question. The definitive answers are found in *Amoris Laetitia*, paragraph 300. These answers certainly offer material for further discussions, but they also provide an important clarification and an indication of the path to follow. “If we consider the immense variety of concrete situations... it is understandable that neither the Synod nor this

Exhortation could be expected to provide a new set of general rules, canonical in nature and applicable to all cases.” Many expected such rules, and they will be disappointed. What is possible? The Pope says clearly: “What is possible is simply a renewed encouragement to undertake a responsible personal and pastoral discernment of particular cases.”

Naturally this poses the question: what does the Pope say in relation to access to the sacraments for people who live in “irregular” situations? Pope Benedict had already said that “easy recipes” do not exist (AL 298, note 333). Pope Francis reiterates the need to discern carefully the situation, in keeping with St. John Paul II’s *Familiaris Consortio* (84) (AL 298). “Discernment must help to find

possible ways of responding to God and growing in the midst of limits. By thinking that everything is black and white, we sometimes close off the way of grace and of growth, and discourage paths of sanctification which give glory to God” (AL 305). He also reminds us of an important phrase from *Evangelii Gaudium*, 44: “A small step, in the midst of great human limitations, can be more pleasing to God than a life which appears outwardly in order but moves through the day without confronting great difficulties” (AL 304). [...]

Is it an excessive challenge for pastors, for spiritual guides, and for communities if the “discernment of situations” is not regulated more precisely? Pope Francis acknowledges this concern: “I understand those who prefer a more rigorous pastoral care which leaves no room for confusion” (AL 308). However, he challenges this, remarking, “We put so many conditions on mercy that we empty it of its concrete meaning and real significance. That is the worst way of watering down the Gospel” (AL 311).

Pope Francis trusts in the “joy of love.” Love is able to find the way. It is the compass that shows us the road. It is both the goal and the path itself, because God is love and love is from God. Nothing is more demanding than love. It cannot be obtained cheaply. Therefore, no one should be afraid that

Pope Francis invites us, with *Amoris Laetitia*, to take too easy a path. The road is not an easy one, but it is full of joy!

**“A small step, in the midst of great human limitations, can be more pleasing to God than a life which appears outwardly in order but moves without confronting difficulties.”**

**“We put so many conditions on mercy that we empty it of its concrete meaning and real significance. That is the worst way of watering down the Gospel.”**

## MIRIA'S TREASURE

**E**nglish class is almost over, but Miria hasn't copied a single word of the many written on the blackboard into her notebook. She's been going to the Meeting Point in Kampala for two years, since she discovered she had HIV and went there for medical help. There, in addition to receiving treatment, she's learned how to write in *Acholi* and to speak some English. Today, however, her mind is elsewhere, and as the other women start to form a circle to sing and dance, Miria picks up her bag and sets off along the muddy paths through the Kireka slum. She just doesn't feel like staying any longer; she wants to go home and see if she can find a solution to the mess she's gotten into.

A few months before, she had asked if she could borrow money from their village savings, one of the funds directly managed by small groups of women from Meeting Point. They pool their savings at the end of the month to give them the possibility of taking out low-interest loans. With the money, Miria had started buying and reselling coal in nearby villages. But then, things took a turn for the worse and she was no longer able to pay back the loan. The group's treasurer, Geraldine, reminded her for weeks that the payment was past due, and it was more than a few Ugandan shillings. Miria grew more and more anxious and all her thoughts turned to one conclusion: "I can't go back to Meeting Point anymore."

**THE NURSES AND VOLUNTEERS DIDN'T SEE HER FOR SEVERAL MONTHS.** It was not the first time that someone, not having been able to pay back a loan, took off. Then, one day she showed up again.

It was time for medical visits and all the women were lined up outside the clinic, but Miria stood off to the side without coming close. Her skin was covered in lesions and she'd lost weight. She wasn't exactly sure why she came back, but she knew it was because of something stronger than her shame. Even when her friends recognized her and started to whisper amongst themselves, Miria stayed put.

**QUICKLY, THE WOMEN'S WORDS TURNED TO DISAGREEMENT.** Many of them didn't want to welcome her back, because "they can't be naive," because "first she has to take responsibility for what she's done," or because "she at least needs to try to repay the money." As the discussion escalated, one of them named Tina stopped them and asked, "But if Miria doesn't learn how to handle money, what a family is, or what it means to belong here with us, where is she supposed to learn it?" She then stood up and walked over to her and, without much ado, invited her to stay.

It was late afternoon by the time the women headed back to their homes. Tina and Geraldine walked together, and before saying goodbye Geraldine asked her, "Why did you want to welcome her back? We could've taken a little more time to think, to see what to do..." Tina took her by her arm and said, "Today, I didn't want to miss out on the sight of her face when she realized that she could start all over. Once again."



# ARTIMONDO

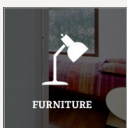
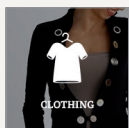
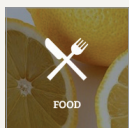
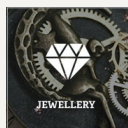
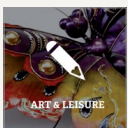
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