

Presentation of the Apostolic Exhortation “Dilexi te”

Sr. Clémence

I would prefer that on this occasion Lacri, Pana or another of the Roma women with whom we shared our life on an empty field in the south of Italy for several years would be seated in my place. These women who as we recalling in the Exhortation, due to their situation of exclusion, are “*doubly poor*” but in whom “*we find [...] the most admirable gestures of daily heroism in the protection and in the care of the fragility of their families.*” (1)

The memory of Ancuza, entering into our hut, her discreet smile on her lips and a big piece of bread that was still warm in her hands, is still alive in me. Seeing us, she broke the bread in two and gave us half, saying to us “*for your meal this evening.*” Astonished witnesses of their offering, we were touched by the attention that they gave us when we knew of the difficulties they had earning their living. Even though materially poor, they are rich in humanity!

Many of them have not studied, but they possess inside them this wisdom that is formed through the experience of fragility that leads to sharing and solidarity. The Holy Father invites us to recognize the “*mysterious wisdom that God wants to communicate to us through them.*” (2) By their example, we rediscover solidarity because, careful to reserve our riches, we have often tend to forget it.

“*I have loved you*”: Luminiza has lived this phrase on the inside, experienced at the deepest part of her heart. I see us still seated on the side of the bed in the small but clean hut, and that she told us: “*I was the lost sheep, undisciplined, and He, the Lord, he came to find me, he took me on his shoulders, like that and he traveled with me.*” That day, I admired, but I also envied her faith! I saw clearly that her relationship with the Lord was much simpler, more direct, more concrete than mine. That is why I see my elf in this phrase of *Dilexi te*: “*It is a surprising experience [...] and becomes a veritable turning point in our personal life, when we realize that it is precisely the poor who evangelize us.*” (3)

I cannot pass over in silence the moment in June 2014 when an accidental fire burned half the huts of the field. The little that we had, along with about sixty other families, was entirely consumed in several minutes. No more shelter, no more housing, clothes, or

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3. *Dilexi te* P. 41 (n. 109)
4. *Dilexi te* P. 22 (n. 63)
5. *Dilexi te* P. 13 (n. 35)
6. *Dilexi te* P. 39 (n. 103)
7. *Dilexi te* P.16 (n. 44)
8. *Dilexi te* P. 19 (n. 56)

places to prepare food...Everything had to start anew. And yet, on that day, I never heard a single complaint among our friends and neighbors, only a litany of praise: “*thanks to God, we are all alive!*”, “*God has accompanied us this far, he will not abandon us, Tomorrow, we will set out again with the help of God.*” It is through them that I discovered this capacity to center myself on the essential: life, the present moment, with confident abandonment to Providence. In this, they continue to be my “spiritual teachers.” (4)

Thanks be to Pope Leo for the message that he has offered us today, this call to be “*a Church that is poor and for the poor,*” (5) but especially “*with the poor.*” (6) This apostolic exhortation allowed me to revisit all those years lived among my Roma friends and to discover how what we had lived together was for me on the order of a sacrament, as is emphasized in the text: “*the poor person is not only someone to help, but the sacramental presence of the Lord.*” (7)

Together **with them**, as the Holy Father invites us, let us set about to bring about this “new civilization where the poor [are not] problems to resolve, but brothers and sisters to welcome” (8) because we have all been loved.

Presentation of Little Sister Clémence

By nationality Belgian, Clémence entered the Little Sisters of Jesus at the age of 26, attracted by the simplicity of this contemplative religious life at the heart of the world that shares the life of those who are excluded.

After a period of formation in Belgium in a multicultural neighborhood, she was sent to southern Italy to join a fraternity among the Roma people. Those six years shared with them were for her a foundational experience.

More recently, she joined the general fraternity where he is now part of the Communications Secretariat team.

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