

LENT 2023

«Charity does not lock doors»

(Saint Luigi Orione)

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Reflections for Lent

1/2023

The General Chapter invites us to open our eyes and our hearts to those people in need of our help and who may be just next to us, but whom we do not notice, not because we are selfish, but perhaps because we are blocked by our patterns and traditions. Lent is the ideal time for a journey of conversion from perhaps too institutionalized models of doing charity, to a simpler, direct, unconventional charity. To help our Lenten journey we thought of two meetings based on the reflection of the Word of God.

The **first** should be done at the level of community or, if possible, charismatic family. It is meant to encourage us to open our eyes to see God passing by or knocking at our door. It is based on the parable of Lazarus and the rich man and the episode of the encounter between the cleric Luigi Orione and Mario Ivaldi. The fruit of this meeting should be the concrete decision to help someone who needs support but does not find acceptance within the rigid patterns of institutions.

The **second**, to be done some time later, in advanced Lent, takes instead inspiration from the episode of the multiplication of the loaves to feed the crowd, emphasizing especially the phrase: “Give yourself something to eat”. Solidarity and sharing are the keys to the evangelical conversion of our work. It would be nice, where possible, for those people (at least some of them) whom we decided to help, to participate in this meeting. The fantasy of charity will inspire us to find the best way to set up this meeting. The central message is that our sharing does not want to be a simple welfare action, but a sharing of life and experiences, because all can give something, and also, while giving, we receive much more.

We have chosen not to present a scheme of meeting or prayer but simply the material of reflection so that everyone feels free to organize a *Lectio* or a school of the word, or a simple prayer meeting with sharing of the word or even the monthly recollection.

FIRST MEETING



Presentation of the Gospel passage

The Evangelist Luke has a particular sensitivity for the poor, who are looked upon with predilection and receive the announcement of the Good News. On the way to Jerusalem, Jesus gives a series of teachings on various issues such as prayer, mercy, conversion, the use of goods... In this context, sensing the danger of riches, the parable of Lazarus and the rich is placed. In this sense, Lazarus' parable is the antithesis of the parable of the astute administrator (Lk 16:1-9). Jesus is mocked by the Pharisees for having affirmed the impossibility of serving God and money (Lk 16,13); they reject not only his teaching, because they are attached to money (Lk 16,14) but the very person of Christ; Jesus therefore accuses them of not acting according to the logic of God (Lk 16:15) and hence the account of the parable.

Lk 16:19-31 (The parable of the rich man and Lazarus)

«There was a rich man who dressed in purple garments and fine linen and dined sumptuously each day. And lying at his door was a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who would gladly have eaten his fill of the scraps that fell from the rich man's table. Dogs even used to come and lick his sores.

When the poor man died, he was carried away by angels to the bosom of Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried, and from the netherworld, where he was in torment, he raised his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. And he cried out, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me. Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am suffering torment in these flames'.


Abraham replied, 'My child, remember that you received what was good during your lifetime while Lazarus likewise received what was bad; but now he is comforted here, whereas you are tormented. Moreover, between us and you a great chasm is established to prevent anyone from crossing who might wish to go from our side to yours or from your side to ours.'

He said, 'Then I beg you, father, send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers, so that he may warn them, lest they too come to this place of torment.'

But Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the prophets. Let them listen to them.’

He said, ‘Oh no, father Abraham, but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’

Then Abraham said, ‘If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone should rise from the dead’».



Points for reflection

✓ The first part of the parable presents the clothing and food of the rich, then the clothing and food of the poor. The second part recounts what happens with the death of both. In this way the formidable contrast that separates them in life and in death stands out.

✓ The rich man has no name, he is full of himself, that is, empty inside. He could represent each of us. The poor, however, is called Lazarus, which means “God helps” both because God helps the poor and because the poor is God who helps us! “What you have done to one of them you have done to me, so be blessed” (cf. Mt 25). That is, **the poor is there to help us and has a name**: the poor is God who helps me!

✓ Jesus, in fact, reverses the scale of values by giving all attention to the poor.

✓ There is no mention of particular sins of the rich or of particular merits of the poor. Then why is the rich condemned? For the luxury, the designer clothes, the gluttony? No, not even because he was bad (a sinner)! His real sin is indifference towards the poor: not a gesture, a crumb, a word. The opposite of love is not hatred, but indifference, so the other does not even exist.

✓ In the Bible, wealth, since it is a blessing from God and comes from Him, is never an evil. But it can constitute a danger for man when it takes the place of God and of his will in the heart of man. From the way Jesus tells the parable it seems that in his mind the determining factor is the fact that the rich are concerned that their desires and pleasures are satisfied, while the poor are worried about surviving. Sometimes we too risk being caught up in “our own things” to the point where we divert our attention from the misery of those around us.

✓ The ultimate criterion of judgment is love, as it influences our life. The rich loved only himself and did not see the poor. He didn't need him, so even though he may have seen him physically, it was as if he didn't exist (self-reference).

✓ The means that is proposed to us for conversion is charity and attention to those in need, especially those

around us.

✓ But things must be settled immediately, here on earth, because with death there will be the individual judgment for each, which will no longer be changed. God has given us this temporary and imperfect life precisely because by exercising our freedom we can choose whether we want to be with Him or without Him, but the choice must be made here and if we reject Him, we have already given ourselves the judgment: we wanted to be without Him then we will remain without him for the whole eternity.

✓ The choice must not be made based on intellectual notions or on emotionally strong facts, it must be made in everyday life, in prayer and in everyday actions, because it is there that He presents Himself to us and asks us: Do you choose to be with or without Me?

✓ So Luke shows us two possible paths: that of sharing goods with those in need, and that of keeping everything for ourselves.

✓ We can also say that Lazarus represents the silent cry of the poor of all times and the contradiction of a world in which immense wealth and resources are in the hands of a few. Everyone looks at himself, without thinking that they can help others even with the little they have.

✓ At every moment, we, with our earthly goods, can build our consolation or our future torments.

Luigi Orione and Mario Ivaldi (the initiative of charity)



(From the story as reported by Don Orione himself)

Today, July 3 is the anniversary of the opening of the first oratory of Tortona. I was still a student and a guardian of the cathedral (*he smiles for the phrase used*). In that Lent the first boys began to come. The first of these was a certain Mario Ivaldi, who is now in Rivalta Scrivia.

During Lent a cleric of the seminary, Luigi Gatti, who died a few years ago, a priest in Voghera, taught catechism in the parish of San Michele. He beat this boy, who ran away. I saw in the Duomo, from 11 to 12 this young man who wandered. I asked him:

Aren't you going to catechism?

No.

And why?

They beat me there.

And who beat you?

A priest.

Go back to catechism! Be good, go to catechism.

No, no, no!

I really understood that there was no way to bring him back to St. Michael, so I started to give him some catechism.

The second boy was Tani, now an High Officer in Albenga, owner of various furnaces and this was also beaten by another priest: he fled home, did not want to go. When he met Ivaldi, he said to him: Come to the Duomo and the cleric who teaches catechism to me will also teach you.

So after the first two came others and others, led by the first.

I remember a certain Mietta, Domenico Ivaldi di Cerreto Grue, Luigi Oddone, Pollastri, Medico Barbieri, who later became Parish priest of Santa Maria Canale, and so many others. I took them all to a room under the vault of the Cathedral with the danger that they would fall from the windows that are in the part between the Cathedral and Bishop's house. Since the boys were many, I asked the Bishop to give me another larger place.

He replied: - If after Easter, that is, if the Catechism is finished, they will come again, we will see. Now, since not only the same were still there, but to these were added others, the Bishop of the time, Monsignor Bandi,

gave us his garden, where now are the economic kitchens “Princess Jolanda”.

It was therefore a day on Sunday, July 3, and present Bishop Bandi, Canon Daffra, already elected Bishop of Ventimiglia, the Abbot Doria and the Clerics of the Seminary, who in that year had delayed by a few days the family visit, the first Oratory was opened in the Bishop’s garden.

You know, it was a beautiful garden, with pine trees, flower beds and myrtle backs and also with apricot plants that had ripe fruits back then. Well, two weeks later they didn’t even know where the flower beds were: they had cleaned up. We also put on an altar, which a few years ago was still at Dante.

At the opening there was also the father of Lorenzo Perosi, there was Lorenzo Perosi and his brother Marziano and they sang: O Luigi, vague lily...

Many good fathers of families came out of this Oratory; and when I go to Tortona, I see myself surrounded by so much good affection on the part of so many men, fathers of families; many I do not know them anymore, but they were almost all coming to our first Oratory.

In our Colleges good things are done, but with the festive Oratory much more is done; in fact in the evening, when they return to the family they tell the things they have heard and seen and so the good multiplies.

For the reflection:



- ✓ Luigi Orione takes the initiative with Mario: the great works begin from the bottom, from small things. Behind the weeping of the child was a call from God as was the call of the first disciples.
- ✓ It seems a simple episode without much involvement, instead it became the fundamental episode of the birth of our Congregation, the spark that strikes in the heart of the young Luigi Orione and instils in him the need to do something to help others.
- ✓ In the life of Don Orione there will undoubtedly be more courageous and striking episodes, such as the action taken in the two earthquakes, or the opening of some institutions, but none proves so decisive for the birth or development of the Congregation as this action.
- ✓ Luigi could have limited himself to saying two words, maybe to scold the other cleric who had treated the boy badly, or even ignore the case as one of the many episodes that happen, “all will eventually settle itself”. Instead, he opens his eyes, his heart and his arms to welcome this boy. This simple but profound

gesture highlights how Don Orione has always had a heart without borders, “thrown into the fire of the new times”.

✓ I too, like Don Orione, am called to come out of my selfishness, self-love, comfort, security to become aware of the cry of the poor, “flesh of Christ” that challenges my life.



Questions for the dialogue

- Among the many things that represent my comfort, my hobbies, what could I give up this Lent in order to give more listening and more support to someone who really needs? How much time and resources do I devote to satisfying my needs or desires? In what forms does my selfishness present itself?
- Faced with a need or a person who suddenly confronts me, disrupting my plans, how do I react? Do I welcome him with generosity or do I pretend not to see/hear? Does the situation of the poor in our area/parish/neighbourhood influence our choices?

- Are we aware of the poor people crying at my door? Are we allowing ourselves to be provoked? Are we willing to see them and meet them?
- The times are changing rapidly and with them the economic and social situation of many people is changing. Are our works adapting to such changes or are they stuck in the care of usual residents? As a community, can we get out of our securities and schemes to take charge of someone (or some case) who is not already assisted by our works?

