



March 2016 Meditation

## Father Kolbe: the man who takes care

Let's continue our journey in the walk proposed by the Jubilee of Mercy and stop at the next work: **"clothe the naked."** The Bible proposes an attitude of compassion in the face of nudity: "Give to the naked some of your clothing" (Tb 4:16): is one of the exhortations that Tobit stresses with his son Tobias. To enter the journey, Tobias must learn to give alms; he must learn the art of sharing. In biblical language it isn't, as we imagine, a gesture of benevolence towards someone who is needy, but an attitude of mercy through which we want to express a full relationship, a deep understanding, a generous and unconditional communion with God's creatures whom we encounter in the journey of life.

Scripture praises he who "clothes the naked" (Ez. 18:16) and recognizes in this act the true fast: **"This is the fasting that I wish: clothing one who is naked" (Is 58:7).** In the universal judgment such action is qualified as a work of mercy because it is on mercy and love that we will be judged: "I was naked and you clothed me" (Mt 25:36). The universal judgment, according to Matthew, consists in the mercy used towards the neediest. In the parable of the good Samaritan (Lk 10: 25-37) is indicated the respect and care that Christians must have towards the body, above all towards who is reduced to nudity and suffers.

**The human act of clothing who is naked is based for the Bible on the original gesture of God that dressed human nudity,** preparing the clothes and then dressing Adam and Eve after their transgression: **"The Lord God made for man and woman leather garments" (Gen 3:21). They see themselves reintegrated in their dignity, they will see their fragility enveloped in the divine mercy, their extremities protected and covered.** Clothing the naked implies a taking care of their body, but also implies a taking care of their soul, in such as clothes protect the inner nature and underlines that man is a spiritual creature who needs to be guarded and protected.

**From father Kolbe, the man who takes care of others,** Warren P. Green<sup>1</sup> and Daniel L. Schlafly<sup>2</sup> affirm: "Numerous testimonies have declared that in the autumn/winter of 1939/1940, father Kolbe was able to help many in need without regard if they were Christians or Jews...". The first arrival of the Jews at Niepokalanów goes back to December 12, 1939.

**Father Kolbe, superior of the convent, welcome with a Franciscan heart all the unfortunate and shared with them all possible. He treated the refugees and the Jews with great love.** Food for the Jews, as well as everyone in the convent, was simple, but diligently prepared and in sufficient quantity for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Furthermore, the sick Jews received special portions, according to the particular need they had.

Brother Hieronim (deceased August 4, 2001) and Brother Juventyn (deceased July 27, 1997) remember these instructions from father Maximilian: “We must do all possible to alleviate the slavery of these poor ones, torn from their family nests and deprived of all the most basic things. We must take care of our compatriots (...). There must not be differences because of religion or race. They are all Poles, including Jews.” “For each one father Maximilian had a word of consolation, he would bend over every person crying, to alleviate his difficult condition of exiled.

**We brothers, attracted to his testimony, shared with them food, fuel and clothes.**

**“Father Maximilian,” said Mrs. Zajac,** speaker of the Jewish refugees at Niepokalanów, our lives have been destroyed by the invasion. **We have been hunted in our homes and led by force in exile.** For us it’s been impossible to celebrate the Festival of Lights<sup>3</sup>. Even if we had to renounce to the feast of Hanukkah, now our children can finally take part in a feast. It’s a very beautiful experience for our little ones. Forced to abandon their homes and the security that the family environment gave them, they were confused and frightened. But **he, father Maximilian, with his brothers, made us feel at home and transmitted to us a sense of security and stability. You have dressed us again with welcome and dignity.”**

The prisoners of war, the homeless, the orphans, the Jews hunted everywhere, felt “at home” in Niepokalanów. **The excluded from life, in the nudity of their impotence and misery, in the humiliation and deprivation of their dignity, have experienced that it is lovely to live with the brothers that took care of them.** Father Maximilian with his brothers didn’t organize a collection of help to send to the poor, rather they welcomed them under their same roof. In the face to face meeting with the poor, he has given us a concrete demonstration of charity and gratuity. The welcomed person didn’t feel humiliated, rather, at the center of a tender and loving relationship that restored the feeling of uniqueness of person, of a creature of God.

**A well-known Indian proverb says: “All that isn’t given, is lost.”**

**We are rich inasmuch as we have given.**

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