



The second work of spiritual mercy: *instruct the ignorant*
Father Kolbe, teacher and guide to those who live in ignorance and error

“An angel of the Lord spoke to Phillip, ‘Get up and head south on the road that does down from Jerusalem to Gaza’...So he got up and set out. Now there was an Ethiopian ... seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. The Spirit said to Phillip, ‘Go and join up with that chariot.’...Phillip said, ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’ He replied, ‘How can I, unless someone instructs me?’ Then Phillip opened his mouth and ...proclaimed Jesus to him...and the eunuch saw him no more but continued on his way rejoicing.”¹

“Go and join up.” The angel of the Lord spurs Phillip to go near this man, to be his neighbor, his companion on the journey: it’s a beautiful image of evangelization, of announcing the Word of God. We must get close, be near, as Jesus did with the publicans and sinners, without fears, without the security of distance, without barriers.

“How can I, unless someone instructs me?” The Ethiopian seeks a person who can guide him, teach him. He asks to be helped in the understanding of the holy text so to give a good direction to his life, every day and in every situation.

“Phillip...proclaimed Jesus to him.” Phillip makes Jesus known, his life discovered and understands how the good news, upsets and illumines the life of the Ethiopian as well as ours.

“And the Ethiopian saw him no more but continued on his way rejoicing.” A joy that puts in action, that pushes to walk, even to run. It’s the joy of encountering Christ, of mercy and healing, of waiting and returning; a contagious joy, that makes one resume the journey, travel new roads to go and seek other travelers and proclaim Jesus to them, the good news.

The New Testament shows Jesus himself as “teacher” (*didaskalos, rabbi*). Jesus is a teacher with his life and person, with his gestures and words. He lived what he spoke, believed in what he proclaimed.²

What is of most importance is to “always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope” (1Pt 3:15). Saint John Paul II, in the encyclical *Fides et ratio* (1998), gave great importance to this decisive task for our contemporary world, affirming. “It’s illusion thinking that faith, supported by a weak reasoning, is more inclusive; on the contrary, it falls into the grave danger of reducing itself to myth or superstition” (n.48). Because of this, he concludes, affirming that “the most urgent thing today is to guide men to discover their capacity to know the truth and their yearning for a final and definitive sense of life” (n. 102).

Paul VI had said: “Contemporary man listens more to witnesses rather than teachers or if he listens to teachers it is because they are witnesses.”³ **The teacher-witness Kolbe**, faced with the spread of evil, senses that there is a remedy, a strength: Mary, the Immaculate. For this reason, he begins the Militia of the Immaculata, a grand ecclesial movement of marian and missionary spirituality. It will be called “Militia”: a strange word, far from our sensibility, but it is a Militia in the faith, it’s a fighting for the good, not for suppressing someone. Anyone can belong to it:

religious and laity. **“Militia,”** because, as father Kolbe will say: “it can’t afford the luxury of rest, but wants to conquer all men with love, to lead them to God through Mary.”⁴

Father Kolbe, apostle marked by the fire of the mission, can’t rest at the thought that there are many unhappy people that don’t know the Lord Jesus. He invites confreres, friends and every person he meets, to work in the spirit of the M.I. to the total giving of one’s life. To the clergyman Brother Paolo Moratti, father Maximilian writes: “There are still many anguished, betrayed, seduced, unhappy souls: “Beautiful mission for which is worth the pain of living, suffering, working and dying (would heaven allow as martyr). So living we too will be sanctified as victims consumed by love” (KW 31).

The missionary in father Kolbe isn’t born from temperamental chaos, but from the knowledge that there isn’t any time to lose: **“Every heart that beats on earth must know the Gospel and this as soon as possible.”**⁵ For this, he plans in minute detail a new initiative: publish a magazine to bring the message of the Immaculata into the families of Poland and the whole world: the monthly magazine, *“The Knight of the Immaculata”* is born. Soon, the construction of Niepokalanow, the City of the Immaculata, is born. “a work Center”, John Paul II will call it, “where the friars (around 800) are animated by one ideal: communicate to man, through the press, the truth that is the Lord Jesus.” To sow words of life in every heart.

Why does Father Kolbe use the press to spread the Gospel?

Let’s listen to him: **“It’s a good thing to build churches, preach, establish missions and schools,** but all these efforts will be in vain if we ignore the most powerful armament of our times, meaning, the press.”⁶ He also writes, that “a missionary of the pen doesn’t calculate his results by the number of baptismal certificates stamped, but is an educator of the masses, forms public opinion...It’s a long road, but a missionary of this kind, leads, not only single persons, but the masses.”⁷

Of course, in the post-industrial society in which we live, the passing of the faith is particularly problematic: every gesture and every word today must be freshly motivated, otherwise they are useless. It’s a question of rediscovering that **teaching =insegnare (in-signare) means “marking with a sign”**, transmitting codes, methods and instruments of work that allow new generations to build their consciences, talking and meeting together, sharing views and various capabilities, with the gaze always towards reality, to everyday life. This was the intuition of **don Lorenzo Milani**, who would prepare the youth of Barbiana to face the hardships of life, having them measure every day with true problems, real situations. His “popular school” and the program of “civil education” with which he intended to instruct the illiterate and the little ones of Barbiana, took all of his time: he placed all his talents to the service of youth and their future. **An experience summed up in the famous slogan “I care!”**

Can we today, return to earnestly ask ourselves: educate with all our being, are we interested?

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⁴KW 1237.

⁵ref, KW 206.

⁶KW 1249.

⁷KW 1193