

WITNESSING GOD'S COMPASSION TO EACH OTHER IN PATIENCE

“Charity does not mean that we should be blind to what is wrong ,but that we should bear for God what we cannot correct; divine grace reminding us of the reasons that we have for despising ourselves, prevents us from giving way to feelings of contempt, dislike, and natural impatience. A child may be passionate, jealous, disdainful; a sister may be too sensitive, show want of judgement, weakness, partiality. But are these reasons for treating them less kindly, for being less attentive to them? Let nothing shock you or offend you; on the contrary, have compassion on the weaknesses and frailty of others; accept their shortcomings and their foibles; humble yourself ... it matters little as long as you comfort and help you neighbour.”

(EXHORTATIONS OF OUR FOUNDER ON THE OBLIGATIONS OF CHARITY IV)

Twelve years ago I set out from my home to Bujumbura looking for the Congregation of Daughters of Mary and Joseph. At that time I had never met any DMJ but I was prompted by the charism of the congregation which I had read in a book that was introducing all the religious congregations which were in Burundi at that time: “Instruments of God’s mercy”. Since then I have been reflecting on this beautiful gift from God through our founder.

As I reflected on God’s compassion I realised that to be an instrument of God’s mercy requires me to have experienced the merciful love of our God and Father. This supposes that I have come to understand my sinfulness; to realise that I am not perfect; I am a sinner, I need God’s mercy and compassion. The more I am aware of being a pardoned sinner the lesser I will be too quick to judge others because I will see my neighbour as a broken person struggling with her sinfulness.

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Not that I will close my eyes to what is wrong but that I will treat my neighbour less harshly; well aware that she is more than her sins or her weaknesses. This calls for patience.

Being patient with the other requires much inner strength which one can only get through listening to her inner self and learning to let go. It requires us to enter our lives with open eyes; ears and hands so that we know what is really happening

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Witnessing God’s compassion through patience counteracts our unreflective impulse to fight or flight. It requires us to go beyond the choice between fleeing and fighting; it calls for self- discipline which is not directed to stand as the accuser of our brethren, but as people who understand their struggles and miseries. It then involves staying with and living with the person or a situation we would least like.



It also means overcoming the fear of a controversial subject. Not that we should cause them in our communities but that when there are there; they should be addressed with respect to all the members. It is a sign of compassion to my neighbour when I have the courage to sit with her, and address a controversial issue without accusing or judging. Witnessing God’s compassion in patience also means paying attention to shameful and sad memories while searching for sincere forgiveness. It means welcoming and appreciating sincere criticisms.