



Dear Friends,

I invite you today to reflect on something that sounds difficult but is yet fundamental to our understanding of God's love and mercy.

Let us start by considering the astonishing insight of the Prophet Isaiah into the person of the coming Messiah: *"He was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed"* (Is 53:5).

After the Resurrection, St Peter confirms this very same vision as the fulfilment of the promise of salvation: *"He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed"* (1 Pt 2:24).

When we reflect more deeply on this, God's chosen path of salvation, and lovingly contemplate the wounds of the Redeemer, we begin to grasp something of the unfathomable depth of God's benevolence and love for us. God's love includes the willingness to be wounded and suffer – and even die for us – merely in order to save us. For

"Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Eph 5:2).

Is it not evident, then, that Christ, who in baptism made us members of his own body (cf. 1 Cor 12:26), now longs to encourage and enable us to love in just the same



"The spirit of repentance and reparation is a path of spiritual growth, to the point of embracing the Cross."

way that he loved? Will the Holy Spirit not lead the disciples of Jesus to that very height of love in which all evil is overcome by goodness and love? (cf. Rom 12:21).

And so, we can understand that true mercy necessarily includes the willingness to embrace penitence and atonement. Repentance for our own sins and the readiness to make reparation for the sins of others has little to do with moral toughness or outward rigour. Rather it is a path of spiritual growth, to the point of embracing the Cross which is fundamental to our Christian Faith. For *"If any man would come after*

me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Lk 9:23).

Today we are called to do penance, but not so much with penitential cords or strict fasting, but rather by enduring silently, in a spirit of loving patience, as an expression of loving devotion or as an exercise in self-denial, including perhaps at times by exercising restraint in conflict situations, silently enduring injuries or remaining constant in the face of misunderstanding.

In our willingness to embrace penance and reparation, our prayer assumes a new depth and redemptive power. I would be delighted if you would join me today, in the spirit of the message of Fatima, by interceding in this deeper sense for our brothers and sisters in need.

With my best wishes and blessing,

Father Anton Lässer CP
Ecclesiastical Assistant



HELPING in desperate situations

Life in Lebanon has become a constant battle for survival. War, anger, fear, depression and despair have marked people's lives for years now. Just when things seem to be getting better, the next crisis strikes with devastating force. More and more families are being broken apart, and suicides are also on the increase. The Church-run Metanoia Centre in Maghdouché is one of the few places where people can turn to when all seems lost.

Even people who have spent their whole lives grounded in a firm faith are beginning to lose their bearings. "How can God allow this?" they ask themselves. In the Metanoia Centre they can at least pour out all their troubles and find spiritual and psychological support. Often there are personal problems, on top of the appalling situation in the country. Caring for needy family members, disabled children, grave illnesses...

In Hélène's case it was the return of her breast cancer. The reappearance of the disease after five years was a devastating blow for this 48-year-old mother and really shook her faith. She was worried above all about her 13-year-old son. "At night, when he thinks I'm asleep, he searches the internet for cancer treatments," she says. "No child should have to be an expert in oncology," she reflects bitterly. She knows that this time she will probably die. It is hard for her to contemplate leaving behind her husband and son without her. She doesn't want to burden

her immediate family by talking about her fears, and her friends often react helplessly.

At least with the counsellors at the centre, she can speak openly about her fears and vent her anger and frustration. And for a long time she argued with God as well. But slowly, she is becoming less agitated. "One morning, as I was praying, I was overcome with a profound feeling of acceptance. Not resignation, but acceptance. Whatever happens, we will deal with it together – our little family and God." And now, despite her illness, she has gained a greater sense of joy in life and is even helping to support other women who have just been diagnosed with cancer. From her own experience she can now help them.

The Metanoia Centre has a team of expert psychologists and pastoral

counsellors who can support and accompany these individuals, couples and families in crisis. The centre also offers spiritual retreats and other activities and likewise supports over 1,000 families in 45 villages of the surrounding area, with house visits. In this way they are often able to prevent a family breakup or even, occasionally, an attempted suicide.

It costs £6,000 a month to keep this important work going. Could you possibly help them to offer new hope to the many people trapped in seemingly impossible situations?



Counselling has made them a happy family once again.



On retreat: a chance to pray and find meaning together.



Living **WITNESSES** to the resurrection

“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me!” For centuries the ancient “Jesus prayer,” or “Prayer of the heart” has been repeated on the lips of countless monks in the East, and right up to this day. It is also prayed by the Monks of Beit Maroun, Servants of the Cedar of Lebanon.

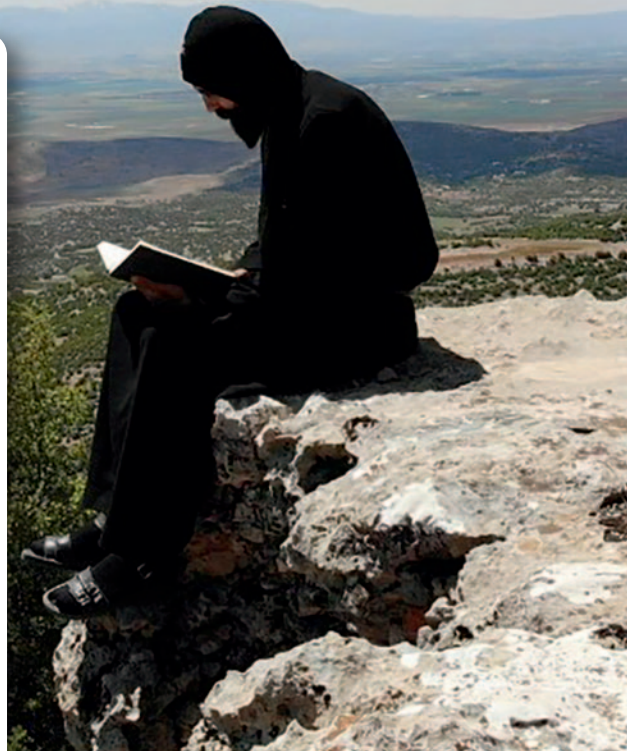
Their community, founded in Lebanon in 2019, follows the traditions of the ancient monastic fathers, especially Saint Maron, a 4th century hermit. The poetic title “Cedar of Lebanon” refers to the Blessed Virgin Mary to whose special protection the community is dedicated. Four days of their week are devoted to ceaseless prayer, which is not even interrupted during their work in the garden, the kitchen or the building work on their monastery. On the other three days they go into the parishes and minister spiritually to the faithful. And for three days each month they live as actual hermits, devoting themselves entirely to seeking God.

These monks make a fourth vow, in addition to the usual three of poverty, chastity and obedience, namely, to contemplate and proclaim the Word of God. “The souls of the monks are healed by the Word of God, so that they can heal others in their turn,” explains Father Maroun Abdo Sassine, the Superior (photo above). Every day, they see just how many people there are in Lebanon who are in need of inner healing. “Many are simply consumed with fear,” Brother Christoph tells us.

The monks rely totally on Divine Providence. So those who support them with their gifts and offerings also become instruments of God’s love and in this way share in their mission. Brother Christoph explains: “When, for example, one of the Fathers hears the confession of someone who has not been near the sacrament for 60 years, and salvation is granted to this soul, then it is thanks to the support of those who have contributed to our mission.”

Your help is urgently needed, in particular for the medical care of the monks. They are literally building their monastery with their own hands and as a result there have been a number of injuries. “In such cases the medical insurance supplied by your generosity has made a crucial difference. The friars have consequently had access to medical care that would have been scarcely possible without your help, since the cost of hospital treatment in Lebanon is extremely high,” Abba Maroun explains. For just **£40** you can provide a monk with medical insurance for a month, or with **£480** for a whole year. It means that accidents, serious illnesses and vital operations no longer fall as an unforeseen financial burden on this young religious community.

“Christ is truly risen, and we are the living, breathing witnesses to this resurrection,” says Brother Christoph. The 23 monks of his community pray for all who support them, that they too may be daily witnesses to Christ.



“O Blessed Virgin Mary, Cedar of Lebanon, intercede for us!”



HELP a child smile again!



Syria: The Gospel message gives fresh strength for everyday life.

Every year, your help enables thousands of children and young people from countries torn apart by war and violence to enjoy a few days of laughter and peace. This includes children who are orphans, refugees, or living with disabilities.

In the **Holy Land**, joy seems to have become a distant prospect for Christians. Nevertheless – or perhaps because of this – the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem has chosen “Rejoice with me!” (Luke 15:6) as the theme for its summer camps this year.

Their goal is to offer 500 children and young people “a spiritual oasis and a safe haven where they can breathe freely again, find healing, and rediscover that God is close,”

writes Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, who personally asks us to help these

young people. “They should learn that true joy is not an escape from life’s difficulties, but a gift rooted in the heart of Jesus – a joy that can remain alive even under difficult circumstances.”

Strengthened within, and filled with new hope and resilience, they can return to their daily lives ready to “live their faith openly, and give quiet but genuine Christian witness of joy, service and peace,” the cardinal emphasises.

In **Ukraine**, these summer camps are called Holidays with God. Despite the war they are held in several dioceses. The Diocese of Mukachevo is once again organising 40 summer camps for a total of 1,600 children and teenagers. Kinga Nobilis, one of the coordinators, explains: “During this terrible war, children and teenagers are also carrying a great deal of stress and fear, which they cannot always articulate appropriately. They hear about the events of the war from their parents, within their families, and on the news. Often, either their father, an older brother, or another family member is serving in the army, and the children themselves



Ukraine: For just a few days they can forget the war.

are filled with fear and anxiety. They need an environment where they can relax and express their feelings. At the summer camps, they can escape their daily routine for a little while. This is not a luxury, but a necessity.”

Depending on the country and the programme, you can give a child or teenager a few carefree days for anywhere between £30 and £70. The young people can play, pray, and sing together, experiencing that they are part of the Church – part of one big family. Painting, craftwork and outings help them recover from the daily stress, both physically and emotionally. Psychological counselling is often offered as well. Will you help one of these children learn to smile again?



Holy Land: shared happiness.



Windows into HEAVEN

Last year, the Diocese of Mbaïki in the southwest of the **Central African Republic** celebrated the 100th anniversary of the arrival of the first missionaries. To mark the occasion the windows of the cathedral were transformed into a “Bible” in coloured glass.

The 33 large windows now portray the Creation Story, the story of Moses, the prophets and kings of the Old Testament and the birth of Jesus Christ, as well as his parables and miracles, his Passion and Resurrection, right through to the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. They were painted by a local artist in the style of the ACN Child’s Bible, first published 47 years ago.

Bishop Jesús Ruiz Molina explains: “In the old cathedrals the Gospel was chiselled in stone so that people who could neither read nor write could still see and understand the love of God and his Salvation history. Here some 75% of the population are illiterate. And so we wanted all of them to have access to the Mystery of God’s love and be able to praise and pray to God as well.”

Children and adults alike now stand in wonderment before the brightly glowing images in the windows. And since the cathedral is the place where the baptism and confirmation courses, and the training courses for the catechists are held, the Bible scenes depicted there are also an important aid to teaching.

For “a picture says more than a thousand words,” as Bishop Molina remarks.

Yvon (12) is a pupil at the minor seminary, a school for boys who would like one day to be priests. The fact that he can even attend school is already remarkable, for he is a member of the Aka people (the Pygmies) who live in simple huts made of leaves and branches and who have generally always



A child of God, through baptism.

been viewed with contempt by the rest of the people. But the Good News of the Gospel has helped the Aka people to understand that they too are beloved children of God. Yvon is filled with joy when he hears of the miracles and parables of Jesus and gazes at the beautiful windows. He particularly likes the scene in which Christ says to Levi, the tax collector: “Come, follow me” (Lk 5:27). Fascinated, he remarks, “Levi followed him to fulfil his mission.” He is also deeply moved by the parable of the lost sheep and the miracle worked by Jesus at the marriage feast of Cana.

Thanks to the generosity of our benefactors, we were able to give £8,600 towards the cost of these “windows into heaven”, through which so many of the people will now be able to “read” the Gospel message. Bishop Molina, who has been a missionary in the Central African Republic for 40 years, tells us: “This beautiful catechetical project will bear rich fruit. I thank you with all my heart for helping us to evangelise these people. May God bless you!” Please continue to help the Church to proclaim the Good News in Africa!



The story of salvation, through a Bible of glass images.



A great day!

For a long time, the three Franciscans working in the parish of San Francisco de Mostazal, a town in central **Chile**, could only rarely go out to visit the Catholics in the surrounding rural areas. So the sects were able to spread, while at the same time there was growing religious indifference among many of the people.

More and more people in Chile are turning their backs on the Church. "It hurts to see that this situation is already becoming so evident, even in the countryside," says Father Nicolás Alfaro Varas. That's why they really need to intensify their pastoral work. However, their old vehicle was costing a fortune in fuel, making every journey terribly expensive.

But now, thanks to your help, the Franciscans finally have a new vehicle. "We marked the big day with Mass," Father Nicolás writes. "Most of the faithful in the parish gathered and we blessed the car and thanked God for it. And we also prayed for everyone whose generosity had made it possible. Once again, many, many thanks!"



Need, love and thanks – your letters

Thank you for the well wishes

Warmest thanks for your birthday wishes and for the beautiful "Irish blessing"! I was delighted, and we are once again happy to be able to support ACN with a donation.

A friend and supporter in Switzerland

A small gift

It's a small gift, but I've decided to pledge my offering monthly in hopes I help in some way. I'm glad my donation is being used to support Catholics amidst environments of persecution.

A supporter in California, USA

On our wedding anniversary

I am a faithful supporter of ACN and have just received your latest issue of the *Mirror* today. I was all the more delighted as my husband and I are just celebrating our 20th wedding anniversary. We've suggested to

all our friends and well-wishers who would like to give us something, to remember us with a donation to ACN and its projects. We're hoping that many of them will support you and so get to know about your work. United in prayer, and in gratitude for the indispensable help you are providing to Christians in need.

A friend and benefactor in Belgium

Incredible inspiration

When I write to you I can't help feeling tearful and emotional at the strength of our communities of religious! It's one of the reasons why I will never cease to support the work of ACN. To me you are part of my family and an incredible inspiration, which shows me that we can always have trust, hope and the assurance that God will never abandon us!

A friend and benefactor in Brazil



Regina Lynch

Executive President,
ACN (International)

Dear Friends,

At ACN we often hear of the cruel suffering of many Christians in war-torn countries. Leading these Christian communities to reconciliation and forgiveness is probably one of the greatest challenges facing Church leaders but as Christians this is what God calls us to do.

Earlier this year, His Eminence Pierbattista Cardinal Pizzaballa, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, wrote a pastoral letter to his diminishing flock with the subtitle, "A proposal for living the vocation of the Church in the Holy Land". In his letter, the Cardinal recognises the many problems facing Christians and a difficult way forward. However, he reminds them that they have a precise mandate to be the "salt and light" of the earth and to be witnesses to others by practicing forgiveness, because "Jesus is the undisputed master of forgiveness". He writes that it takes courage to forgive but that it is a way to break the chain of hatred and renew trust. He encourages Christian families, in which children first learn to love, forgive and to trust, to "become laboratories of reconciliation".

Perhaps we are not facing the same challenges as the Christians in the Holy Land, but I believe most of us are called sometimes in our lives to forgive or to reconcile. May we, too, find the courage to be the salt and light of the earth.

Regina Lynch



Aid to the
Church in Need

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Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) is a Catholic charity bringing spiritual and practical help to Christians – especially those who are persecuted for their beliefs. We carry out our mission of reconciliation and love through local Church partners: supporting priests, Sisters and catechists, building churches, providing transport, training seminarians, and providing religious literature and media – as well as supplying emergency aid for Christians struggling to survive or fleeing persecution. ACN also advocates on behalf of suffering Christians denied a voice. Through prayer, information and action we are keeping the Faith alive in a troubled world.

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