

4. June 2021

“Praise the Lord, my soul!”

Ps 146:1.2, 7, 8-9b, 9c-10

*Praise the Lord, my soul!
I will praise Yahweh all my life,
I will make music to my God as long as I live.*

*He gives justice to the oppressed,
gives food to the hungry;
Yahweh sets prisoners free.*

*Yahweh gives sight to the blind,
lifts up those who are bowed down.
Yahweh protects the stranger,
he sustains the orphan and the widow.*

*Yahweh loves the upright,
but he frustrates the wicked.
Yahweh reigns for ever,
your God, Zion, from age to age.*

The Lord takes care of people's need and distress. That is the message of this psalm and thus a comforting canticle for all those who suffer in the circumstances of their lives. It is the message that the Lord has not forgotten them and is close to all those who especially need Him. Often only the Lord is their comfort, if they are forgotten by people or if they are even responsible for their misfortune.

But it does not stop at the testimony of the goodness and justice of the Lord. In many places in the Holy Scriptures, the Lord calls on people to do the same. They are to have mercy on others as the Lord himself does (*cf. Lk 6:36*). The lovingkindness and goodness of God should shine in them. We know very well, from the testimony of the New Testament, that the last judgement will focus on our acts of mercy towards the poor, with whom the Lord identifies (*cf. Mt 25:31-46*).

In the calendar of the traditional rite, I met St. Francis Caracciolo from Italy on this day. He lived in the 16th century. At the age of 22 he became terminally ill and made a vow to become a priest if he recovered. This is what happened and he

became a priest and pastor on the galleys. There, convicts from the prisons had to serve. Although the saint could not free them physically, he was a great comfort to them. He was particularly touched by the fact that he accompanied those condemned to death to the place of execution. It says in one description:

Francis Caracciolo experienced the most bitter hours every time he had to accompany a criminal on the way to execution. He spent the night before with the condemned in the prison cell. He wept and prayed with the condemned man and heard his last confession. On the way to the place of execution, he walked side by side with the poor man and strengthened him for the terrible moment that lay ahead of him. Then, when the sentence was carried out, Caracciolo regularly broke down, because such experiences attack the heart.

St. Francis Caracciolo was also the co-founder of the “Congregation of the Clerics Regular Minor”. He promoted the Eucharist and introduced “perpetual adoration” in his community. In the morning the whole community prayed one hour before the Blessed Sacrament and in the afternoon each one prayed one hour for himself.

From adoration, the saint surely received the strength for this difficult pastoral ministry, carrying out God's will in service to the poor, as the Psalm tells us. In this way he shows us how we too can do our service to the needy and where the strength comes from. There is an infinite amount of need; if God admonishes us not to overlook it but to take care of it, then he will also give us the grace to deal with it in the right way. We can then hope that with God's grace we will walk the path of the upright and that His love will always accompany us.

As we know it in our Catholic tradition, it is not only the corporal but also the spiritual works of mercy that we are to perform. And indeed, how much spiritual need exists! People are also hungry for spiritual bread, which is given to them less and less today! How many are caught in fears and addictions! What blindness there is in humanity with regard to truth and to how life should be conducted before God!

The Psalm, as well as the life of St. Caracciolo, draw our attention to something important. It is the praise of God, the prayer, which should accompany the works of mercy. From this we derive the grace to be able to do good permanently, to glorify God and to serve men. Far beyond our natural powers and good will, we become able to do works far beyond ourselves, as St. Caracciolo did. But it also glorifies God the simple daily looks at the need of other people and to remedy it

according to our possibilities, and thus we fulfil the commandment of love for our neighbour (*cf. Mt 22:39*).