

20. June 2023

## The greatness of sharing

2 Cor 8:1-9

*Next, brothers, we will tell you of the grace of God which has been granted to the churches of Macedonia, and how, throughout continual ordeals of hardship, their unflinching joy and their intense poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. I can testify that it was of their own accord that they made their gift, which was not merely as far as their resources would allow, but well beyond their resources; and they had kept imploring us most insistently for the privilege of a share in the fellowship of service to God's holy people- it was not something that we expected of them, but it began by their offering themselves to the Lord and to us at the prompting of the will of God. In the end we urged Titus, since he had already made a beginning, also to bring this work of generosity to completion among you. More, as you are rich in everything-faith, eloquence, understanding, concern for everything, and love for us too - then make sure that you excel in this work of generosity too. I am not saying this as an order, but testing the genuineness of your love against the concern of others. You are well aware of the generosity which our Lord Jesus Christ had, that, although he was rich, he became poor for your sake, so that you should become rich through his poverty.*

Today's reading teaches us the deeper meaning of giving and sharing in Christian communities. It is not just an obligation that we have to fulfil; it is a great sign of love. We could say that it is an honour or, even more, a grace to be able to share, and this is what today's biblical text teaches us!

Evidently, the Macedonian community had become even more receptive to God's love in the midst of their need. They had not focused on their own needs; rather they sought ways to express their love. Indeed, Christians are called to see and alleviate in the first instance the need of those who are our brothers and sisters in the faith, without closing our eyes to the need of others who are not Christians. The Macedonians had understood what it means to give and to share; they knew that in a very concrete way they could bring the Kingdom of God to the people. Material help is something we can always give, and if we do it with love and fervour we can become a contagious example to other Christians, as was the case with the Macedonian community.

In any case, Paul used the example of the Macedonians to exhort the Corinthian Christians to be generous. Paul's method is very ingenious, for he challenged them to a kind of "love competition". Of course, it is not a matter of each wanting to outdo the other in order to excel, but of each being inflamed by the example of the other. It is also important to bear in mind the Apostle's intention: it was to help the churches in need. The task entrusted to him was to care for the congregations in Jerusalem.

The dignity of sharing with the poor has another important aspect. I am referring to the dignity of those who take up collections for the needy. They are not 'beggars', who insist and bother people. As we see in the case of St. Paul, those who perform this service give others the possibility to lay up treasures in heaven, if they do it honestly. They are the mediators for those who cannot help themselves. That is why they should never have a guilty conscience for asking, for they are not doing it in their own interest, but for others.

Although the world recognises what is done especially in the humanitarian field, we must remember that the motivation for giving and sharing is love for Christ. This is why St. Paul reminds us that, in helping and sharing, we are deeply united with the Lord: *"You are well aware of the generosity which our Lord Jesus Christ had, that, although he was rich, he became poor for your sake, so that you should become rich through his poverty."*