

Synthesis – Apostolic Exhortation DILEXI TE: *On Love for the Poor* Pope Leo XIV

Key ideas:

Reflection on the centrality of love for the poor in Christian and ecclesial life | Remembering the moral obligation in regard to the needy, every gesture seen as Revelation | Recognizing multiple forms of poverty: material, social, moral, etc. | Shedding an intrinsic existence of riches and success | Recalling that God chooses the poor, showing himself to be their Messiah | Preoccupation for the integral human development of the least | Authenticity in the works of mercy | The care of the needy |

Synopsis:

The care of the poor is part of the Great Tradition of the Church, like a beacon of light that, from the Gospel onward, has illuminated the hearts and steps of Christians of all time. Therefore, we should feel the urgency to invite everyone to immerse himself in this river of light and of life that comes from recognizing Christ in the face of the needy and the suffering. For us Christians, the question of the poor leads to what is essential in our faith, since the poor are not a sociological category, but the very body of Christ.

Summary:

In profound continuity with the Encyclical *Delexit nos*, in which Pope Francis developed the inexhaustible mystery of the divine and human love of the Heart of Christ, the document begins from the words of the Lord: “I have loved you” (Rev 3:9) and wants to point out the strong connection that exists between the love of Christ and his call for us to draw near to the poor.

INTRODUCTION

The first chapter opens by taking up the Gospel text in which Jesus defends the woman who, recognizing in him the suffering Messiah, pours on Him a precious perfume. In affirming: “For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me: (Matt 26:8-11), Jesus reveals that, although small, this gesture was of immense consolation for Him. This shows that no gesture of affection, not even the smallest one, will be forgotten, especially if it is bestowed on one who is in pain, alone, needy, as the Lord was at that hour. And it is exactly in that perspective that affection for the Lord is united with affection for the poor.

CHAPTER 1: SOME INDISPENSABLE WORDS

La The first figure proposed for our inspiration is that of the Saint of Assisi. The young Francis is reborn by his being expelled from his family life, provoking an evangelical rebirth in Christians and in the society of his time that continues to inspire us even eight centuries later. The “preferential option for the poor” produces a renewal in the Church and in society when we succeed in freeing ourselves from self-referentiality and permit ourselves to listen to “the cry of the poor.”

St. Francis (2)

The illusion of a happiness based on riches and success at all cost feeds a culture that “throws away” others, indifferent to death by hunger or disgraceful living conditions. The Holy Father emphasizes that poverty, for the most part, is not accidental or a choice, as is claimed by the false vision of the meritocracy which holds that only those who have achieved success in life have merit. Christians also can let themselves be influenced by worldly ideologies, as is demonstrated by the fact that the exercise of charity is often scorned and ridiculed.

*Ideological
prejudices (4)*

God is merciful love; He reveals himself to his creatures, taking care of their human condition and, therefore, their poverty. In order to share the limits and the fragility of our human nature, He made himself poor, sharing with us also the radical poverty of death. If understood properly, because one can also speak theologically of a preferential option on the part of God for the poor, a “preference” that never indicates exclusion or discrimination against other groups.

CHAPTER 2: GOD CHOOSES THE POOR

*Jesus, the poor
Messiah (7)*

The entire Old Testament history of the preference of God for the poor and the divine desire to listen to their cry finds in Jesus of Nazareth its full realization. The Christ “emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness” (Phil 2:7). This speaks of the same exclusion that characterizes the definition of the poor as those to be excluded from society. Jesus is the revelation of this privilegium pauperum. He presents himself to the world not only as the poor Messiah, but also as the Messiah of the poor and for the poor. Towards the poor, indeed, God shows a preference: to them the word of hope and liberation of the Lord is first addressed and, therefore, even in the condition of poverty or weakness, no one should any longer feel abandoned.

*Mercy towards the poor
in the Bible (9)*

Beginning with his election Pope Francis expressed the desire that the care and attention for the poor would be clearly present in the Church. This desire reflects the awareness that the Church “encompasses with love all who are afflicted with human suffering and in the poor and afflicted sees the image of its poor and suffering Founder. It does all it can to relieve their need and in them it strives to serve Christ.”¹ Several diverse examples of holiness are included in this chapter, not pretending to be exhaustive, but rather an example of that care of the poor that has always characterized the presence of the Church in the world.

CHAPTER 3: A CHURCH FOR THE POOR

*The fathers of the Church
and the Poor (13)*

From its very beginnings, the Church has always taken care of the poor, for example, through the institution of the diaconate on the part of the Apostles. In the same way, in succeeding centuries particular attention and care for the least emerge in many fathers of the Church, in the mission of congregations, both male and female, in the foundation of the mendicant orders as well as in the special role of monasteries as places of refuge and formation of the least. In more recent times this mission is continued in the effort of so many saints, male and female, for the education of the poor, as well as the accompaniment of migrants and the least, including the sick, imprisoned or enslaved.

Care of the Sick (16)

The care of the needy is a constant in the life of the Church that takes its shape more recently also in so many popular movements born to defend the rights of the poor against the structural causes of poverty.

*Accompanying
migrants (24)*

¹ CONC. ECUM. VAT. II, Dog. Const. Lumen gentium, 8

The acceleration of technical and social transformations of the last two centuries, full of tragic contradictions, not only was endured but also confronted and reflected on by the poor (e.g., movements of workers, women and youth). Also the contribution of the Social Doctrine of the Church has in itself this popular root that ought not be forgotten: its rereading of Christian Revelation within modern social working, economic and cultural circumstances would be unimaginable without the participation of Christian laypeople addressing the challenges of our time.

CHAPTER 4: A STORY THAT CONTINUES

The century of the Social Doctrine of the Church (29)

The papal magisterium has addressed the social question with encyclicals such as *Rerum novarum* (1891) of Leo XIII and *Mater et Magistra* (1961) of John XXIII. The Second Vatican Council, initially only slightly attentive to the theme, brought it to the center thanks to John XXIII and Paul VI emphasized the closeness of the Church to the poor and suffering. Documents such as *Gaudium et spes* and *Populorum progressio* reaffirm the universal destination of goods. John Paul II consolidated the preferential option for the poor as an expression of Christian charity. Benedict XVI, in *Caritas in veritate* (2009), identified love of neighbor as the search for the true common good, denouncing the limits of institutions. Pope Francis valued the contribution of the Latin American Episcopal Conferences. In continuity, the magisterium has emphasized that the mission of the Church is tied indissolubly to justice and to universal solidarity.

Continuity of the Magisterium on justice and universal solidarity

Attention of the Church focuses on two fundamental elements: the recognition of the existence of “sinful structures” that create poverty and extreme inequalities, and the need to consider the poor as “subjects” capable of creating their own culture, more than as objects of beneficence.

Sinful structures that create poverty and extreme inequalities (32)

These are therefore recognized as subjects of evangelization and integral human promotion, resources for the entire church through their wisdom and experience.

From this derives that the bi-millennial history of the Church with the poor is an essential part of its journey. The care of the poor is part of the Great Tradition of the Church. like a beacon of light that, from the Gospel onward, has illuminated the hearts and steps of Christians of all time. Therefore, we should feel the urgency to invite everyone to immerse him or herself in this river of light and of life that comes from recognizing Christ in the face of the needy and the suffering.

CHAPTER 5: AN ONGOING CHALLENGE

Christians cannot consider the poor as a social problem, but as a “family matter;” these are “our own.” In this regard, the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) invites us to reflect on our attitude towards those wounded along the road. The words “Go and do likewise” (Luke 10:37) are a daily command.

The Good Samaritan again (37)

In conclusion, the Apostolic Exhortation recalls that Christian love overcomes all barriers, goes out to the distant, unites strangers and makes family members of enemies. It is prophetic, performs miracles and has no limits. A church that does not put limits on love, which does not have enemies but only men and women to love, is the Church the world needs. Through work, the change of unjust structures and gestures of personal help, the poor can hear the words of Jesus “I have loved you” (Rev 3:9).

Still today, giving (41)