

## **Social Mission Conference 2016**

### **Keynote Theological Reflection by His Eminence, Cardinal Tagle**

Good afternoon to everyone. On the outset I would like to thank all of you, especially my brother here, Archbishop William Goh and Janet, Bernadette and all the organisers for bringing me here.

You know, they offered something that I could not refuse, you know. To learn, really not so much for me to share, but to learn from the experience of Singapore. And the opening address of Janet, Archbishop William and the rich sharing of the panel, I think, that is enough. More than enough as a keynote address. Right?

Please agree with me, so that I do not have to say anything anymore.

But really. I appreciate the sharing, the amount of research, reflection, analysis put into the data. Listening to them, I am just overwhelmed too, but I guess part of my role here is also to invite everyone not to lose hope. If we lose hope then we won't act. And we will just take the situation as it is, as fated and then we will add to the misery of the world. A despairing person is the worst type of person who will work for the poor. We need to serve the poor primarily through a loving and hopeful disposition.

I was given the task to provide a theological reflection on the theme – Witness to Mercy, Bearer of Compassion. That first word is supposed to scare you away from the conference or to put you to sleep. But I will try to connect my reflection with the data that have been presented to us. Actually they are not just data, I appreciate very much the narrative component of the reports. For really whenever we have Caritas meetings, whether international assemblies or national and regional Caritas meetings, we remind ourselves, these are not numbers. We are talking about human persons. For the sake of clarity, for the sake of conceptualization, for the sake of presentation, of course, we cannot avoid numbers and statistics but in the end they are about human beings. Numbers disturb us, but human beings touch us.

I have to make a confession. I revised my talk after listening to the sharing. So please bear with me. If I look disconnected or hastily put together it is because I had to reframe my presentation based on what we have heard.

For the non-Catholics who are here, for the non-Christians who are here, thank you very much for sharing with Caritas and the Catholic Church this special moment.

As the theme indicates, the Catholic Church is celebrating a year called the Jubilee Year of Mercy. Pope Francis declared it because he said 'Now is the time for mercy'. When we look at the events in today's world. Wherever there is poverty, injustice, discrimination, when you have this overwhelming problem with the refugees, the illegal migrants, you have children, women neglected, abused, vulnerable people being misused and many others. When you look at them closely you realized they are happening because, partly because, or maybe in large measure because, there is no mercy, there is a lack of mercy. And so, to recover the path to justice, we need also to recover a sense of mercy.

And since I am a Catholic priest, bishop, cardinal, my presentation will be heavily Christian, and Catholic in its choice and its inclination.

So first let me dwell on the word 'witness' and the word, 'bearer'.

Witness. A witness is someone that you call specially to accord hearing so that through the testimony of a witness the truth of something, or an incident and specially the veracity of accounts coming from other people, and again a more truthful and honest assessment of the guilt or the innocence of someone could be established. A witness, the main business of a witness is truth. The truth of something, or the truth about someone.

Now, whoever chose the theme, may the Lord forgive you. I don't know whether you knew what you were doing when you chose this theme. Because all of us would be put on the scales and weighed and might be found wanting in the area of witness.

And here, I go back to the first letter of St John, the first chapter, the opening lines where St John says, we declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands concerning the word of life. We declare to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have communion with us and truly our communion is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. This is the proclamation statement of a person name John who became an apostle, a witness and a bearer of the gospel. What made him and the other disciples a witness? He said, what we have seen, what we have heard, what we have touched regarding Jesus. That's what we declare.

The pre-requisite for becoming a witness to mercy and compassion and here it is the mercy and compassion of God is: have I seen, have I heard, have I touched that mercy and compassion. In my personal life, in my life, within the family and the neighbourhood and often in the life of the poor whose survival is a miracle of God's mercy.

I met a girl who came from a rather wealthy family and she did some missionary immersion in the Philippines, in one slum area, it is not actually a slum area, it is a garbage area where people live mixed with the trash of the city, they make a living out of that. Then you wonder how will the human person see himself or herself if he or she is mixed with the trash of the city. This girl as part of the youth programme of the parish was sent there, and when she saw the place, she said I am not staying here. But they were distributed to different homes, their foster families during the 2 weeks that they would stay there. She wanted to run away but the coordinator of the programme took their passports from them. The coordinator knew that they would run away and so she was forced to stay.

But she told us, she entered this shack which the family called a home. There were little children there, her foster brothers and sisters for the coming 2 weeks, definitely looking initiated, even malnourished, they were looking at her with genuine delight. Then the mother of the house asked her what do you want to have for dinner tonight and it hit her, my parents don't even ask me that, because I seldom see them when I get home, they are still at work. Wow, I don't even know to respond to this question. I am not used to being asked. Then she looked at these little girls and the little boys around her. They are hungry, they are poor but why are their smiles genuine and trying to discover the mystery - what is this? What is this?

And when she was telling me the story, I said she is like St John. What she has seen, what she has heard, what she has touched with her hands regarding the mystery of life taught to her by the poor. Now she is a full-time youth minister and it is her turn now to confiscate the passports of the young people that she brings to these immersion programmes. Having experience that, she becomes a witness and bearer of the good news. She becomes an apostle of mercy and compassion. So that's the first point.

I got your message that means stop now. That is enough.

But just that you know, the theme, Witness and bearer already defines for us a programme – how could I become a true witness to true mercy, how could I be a true bearer of true compassion – what have I heard, what have I seen, what have I touched? Have I seen and touch and heard mercy and compassion? If not in my life, in the lives of those who survive because of this mystery called mercy and compassion.

The second point – in the Christian tradition, when we talk about mercy, we go back to God. Before being a human enterprise, mercy for Christians, is first and foremost an attribute of God. That is why we always qualify mercy with God's mercy or divine mercy and that makes mercy really, really beautiful. But for us who are supposed to be witness to mercy and to be bearers of mercy, what a responsibility. Because it is not just any brand of mercy, it is not just a calling for us to even invent new ways of being mercy and compassionate but doing it God's way, as we have seen, heard and touched. That is why when Archbishop William was talking about formation of our humanitarian workers, that is indispensable. The prayer life and the life of discernment. Even when I am in the field, as I face a poor

person, a person of disability, my mind should be attentive to the presence of God, a never-ending contemplation as I work, as I labour.

Now, to simplify things, because in the bible, mercy is such pervasive, so all pervasive in every page of the bible that we will spend the whole year talking about it and I am sure you do not want that. You want to go home and do your mission.

So let me simplify things. Specially in the old testament, in the Hebrew scriptures, we can say that the Mercy of God is the meeting point of two streams, if you want to use images. Two streams that when they meet, that is where you locate mercy.

The first stream is what we call compassion. In the Hebrew, the word for compassion, divine compassion is *Rachamim* and the root is *Rechem* which is 'the womb of the mother'. Sometimes it is translated as the guts, but very often it is the mother's womb. So when the authors of the old testament depict the compassion of God, one image that they often use is this almost instinctive attachment of a mother to her child. Instinctive. And that is why in Isaiah 49, we have this: can a mother forget her infant and be without tenderness for the child of her womb. Even should she forget, I will never forget you. For the mother, the child from her womb even if another person is not a stranger, there will always be a connection with her.

You know, on the 26 August, my parents will celebrate their 60<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. Both 86 years old. Yesterday before going to the airport, I saw them and then my mother said: Oh! My first born son. I said: everyone knows that already. But it comes spontaneously. That is why I don't know here in Singapore, but in the Philippines, for example, we have an expression: 'A face that only a mother could love'. Other people might despise your face but for a mother, that is the most beautiful face because it is the face of my child. I will never forget you.

And the wisdom of Solomon is manifested in that. Remember that story of two women clinging the same baby. And he said, 'Okay let us divide the child. Each one of you will get half of the child. But each one of you will get a dead half'. And how did Solomon identify the true mother? In the first book of kings, this is how it was recounted, the woman whose son was alive, meaning the true mother of the child. Because she was stared with compassion, her womb started moving. The woman whose son was alive because she was stared with compassion for her son, said to the King, 'Please my lord, give her the living baby. Do not kill it'. But the other woman said it should be neither mine nor yours. Cut it in two. And Solomon said this is the real mother. And the word used there was the compassion from the womb of the mother.

And it is also used even when God uses the image of a father. Now, this is important. For mercy, for God, mercy comes from a connectedness with people, a connectedness that says they are not strangers to me. They are not really others. Compassion springs when I see a son, a daughter, a father, a mother, a neighbour even, if I don't have that almost instinctive attachment to people, mercy, please, divine mercy will not come our way. This is the reason why, even if God is already quite exasperated with Israel, in the prophet Hosea, like a parent, God says, When Israel was a child, I took care of it. I taught Israel how to walk, again the image of a parent. I fed you, now that you are grown up, you turn to other Gods, you have forgotten me. And the justice of God will prevail. I will let you go, I will destroy you Ephraim. I will destroy you Israel. And then after two lines. He says, 'but how can I do that? How could I give you up Ephraim'. And then God remembers I am God. I am not a human being. I am God and I operate on a different set of criteria. I am God. I will never forget you.

So compassion, as far as God is concern is not a fleeting emotion. It is really a deep bond. What later on people will call solidarity. What people will call communion. But it is not again, it is not notional, it is not just emotive but it is real. I really know I am connected with the person. And later on we will see in Jesus what type of connectedness

So the first stream is compassion.

Maybe this is one contribution to the panel. One of the questions that I was toying with is: How could we, not only in Singapore, but in other countries and worldwide, how could we develop a culture of compassion? A compassion that says when I see a child, I see this is my child too. This is my brother

too, this is my sister too, when I see an elderly woman, I see this is my mother too. This is my grandmother too. So that it is not just something superficial.

The second stream is fidelity. Compassion and fidelity.

The word used for fidelity is *hesed*. *Hesed*. And for our Jewish brothers and sisters, *hesed* is rooted in God's extravagant love. Extravagant. Because God refuses to forget God's share in the covenant relationship. Even when the other partner has already forgotten the covenant, or has been unfaithful to the covenant, God will remain faithful. And it is extravagant love because very often it is a fidelity and a love given to someone who does not deserve it. That is why they say it is wasteful love. And we do not want to waste love. We human beings. Our principle is you don't like me, and I don't like you. You sneer at me, I sneer at you. Even children. I see them play in the Philippines. One of them will say ..., making faces. And the other one will say ... They make faces. Double the punishment, even multiples. But here, God is willing to waste love by being faithful. And this extravagant love is manifested precisely in that the recipient of that love is not deserving.

I have to make a confession. We offer possibilities to the poor especially in the area of education. But very often, even in Catholic educational institutions, we say we have scholarships for poor but deserving students. I have a dream, I want to open a school where all those who have been rejected in other schools, those who do not meet the requirements, you can come. And we will be patient with you. Who set the rule that the first grade should be completed in one year? Is that divine law? If a student is slow, ok. If you need 3 years for first grade, I will walk with you. I will be faithful to you. When I brought up this idea. Someone told me, Your Eminence, will the department of education of the government give you a permit to open a school like that? And I told him, and who told you I will ask the government's permission? Maybe a *caritas* school ....you know. Yes. And I think this is also one area why some of the talented people, because their talents are not harnessed from the beginning, when they reach a certain point, they are considered not deserving.

But the fidelity of God is not choosy. God will be faithful even to those who do not deserve it. This is a tall order. This is a tall order. Our societies are based on merits. You have to earn everything. Even love must be earned. How tiring it is, if you have to earn everything. And this is the sign of hope coming from God. You may be the most undeserving as far as the world is concerned, but God is willing to waste God's love by being faithful to you. Hard teaching. Hard teaching, but I have to be true to the word of God. Even I perspire whenever I teach this, but I hope this is not the kingdom of this world. But who knows, who knows, some valiant and courageous people might take up this inspiration. Mercy is where compassion and fidelity meet.

That's the old testament.

Are we still together? Am I still making sense to you? You are very kind. Merciful.

Now when we go to Jesus Christ. The very person of Jesus, and I mean his teachings and the way he related with people would bring mercy, as compassion and fidelity to human flesh. That is why during this year of Jubilee, Pope Francis would always remind us that the mercy of God has acquired a face in Jesus Christ.

Again this is a very rich section. But let me just dwell on a few.

The first is to remind us of Jesus' parables of mercy. The most famous are the three, in the fifteenth chapter of St Luke. The lost sheep. The shepherd leaves the ninety-nine sheep in search of the one that is lost. The second is the lost coin. A woman who has still nine coins would clean the whole house in search of that one missing coin. And the most famous, the third is the prodigal son. The father with two sons. The eldest, very obedient, hardworking. The younger one, took early his share of the inheritance. Left the father, left the home, squandered his resources and then became poor and decided to come back, not anymore as a son but as a hired worker. But the father accepted him and even threw a party for him.

If you look at those three. You say, why is the shepherd wasting time? If the shepherd is also a businessman, you have ninety-nine healthy sheep, and you leave them, they are already sure profit and you look for one that is lost. And why would the sheep get lost. It might be sick, it might be wounded or it is dumb, plainly dumb. The rest are moving in this direction.... So whether the sheep is sick, or wounded, or dumb, from a business proposition, that lost sheep is a liability. Why compromise the ninety-nine for that one? Or this woman, you have nine coins and you clean the whole house, you are tempted and tempted to tell that woman. Relax. That is just a coin, I could give you two, three. Relax. And if you need that coin for a dowry. Then, we will provide it for you but no. She sweeps the whole house.

And then the father, why waste your love, why waste your money for a party to welcome that son? And so, from a human perspective, the attitude of the elder son is quite understandable. He refuses to enter the house and look at the language, he said: when *YOUR* son comes back after squandering your wealth, you threw a party for him. I have been working and have been slaving for you but you have not given me even a goat to have a feast with my friends. So the elder son could not accept that this returning boy is his brother.

But when you look at the three, there is only one reason. Why the shepherd looks for the lost sheep, why the woman sweeps the house for the lost coin. Why the father welcomes the lost son. Only one reason. It is my own. It is mine. It may be a wounded, sick sheep, but it is mine. And if you cannot go home, I will look for you, carry you back home. No other reason. You are mine. Not because of any gain that I will have but simply because you belong to me. You are in my heart. We are brothers, we are sisters, we are one family.

But for Jesus this is not just teaching. Jesus did it. He is, according to St Paul, in the letter to the Philippians, he is the son of God, but he emptied himself, of the glory of the divinity while remaining Son of God. He emptied himself of all glory and became human. He entered our human condition and according to the letter to the Hebrews, he became a compassionate brother because he experienced all the temptations that we are subjected to. He is no longer the harsh judge but a compassionate brother because he became one of us. That is why in his teachings that message comes through. We are not strangers, you belong to me, we belong to each other.

Jesus knows the experience of many babies born on the streets. Jesus knows the experience of being a refugee when the family went to Egypt. Jesus knew what it means not to have a place where it is safe to stay. Should we go back to Nazareth? Should we go elsewhere? What have we done? The baby has not even done anything but cry but heaven was already against him. After birth he was already cursed. At the age of 12, he got lost in Jerusalem. And the mother and the father frantically looking for him. How many parents are still looking for their children? Arrested by military people? Kidnapped or subjected to human trafficking. Mary and Joseph found the child after three days. I know one woman has been searching for her son for the past 10 years. And in her maternal womb she knows he is alive.

Jesus knows that. Then he started his mission. He was betrayed by friends. He knows the experience of being sold. He knows the experience of the powers that be contriving against someone they consider as a threat to society because he questions the presuppositions of the prevailing system. He was dragged in the busy streets, proclaimed as a criminal. And when he was nailed to the cross, his friends had all deserted him. Nobody wanted to call him our own. Nobody wanted to be associated with him. He knows how to be lonely. He knows the feeling of being neglected. He knows the experience of even family and friends saying, we do not know him. It is good he had a mother who stood at the foot of the cross declaring to the world, he is my son. The mercy of God coming to us again through this mother who courageously proclaim, ok arrest me. I am his mother. But I will never, never abandon him.

You know those reports that we heard? If Jesus would only say, I was a refugee too. I was betrayed too. I was left alone. Nobody stood for me. And by entering our world, we are Jesus' own. He will never give up on being merciful, compassionate, faithful, because he is a brother. He is a brother. The incarnation. Heavy word. Incarnation. But really if we look at it, because God has become human then, mercy, compassion, fidelity have become a human person also. Jesus.

But look, brothers and sisters, he rose from the dead, telling us that the story does not end there. The story will have a very good ending. The triumph of goodness, of love.

According to the gospel of St John, chapter 20, Jesus appeared to the disciples after the resurrection. And even if the doors were locked because they were afraid of the Jews, they might be arrested too. You know whenever there is fear, there is the locking of doors. And then you also lock your hearts. We lock our hearts when we are afraid so that our hearts will not be affected anymore. And then our concern will be self-preservation.

I visited a parish in Manila, where the pastor, and every person in the rectory needed probably a dozen keys to get to the rooms. And I said how come. He said, Ah because we had experiences of his and that, and I said, 'but how about during an emergency, how do you get out?'. And he said, that is a problem, we also cannot get out.

Nobody can get in but can you get out? When you have already developed as a lifestyle this locking, locking, locking of doors because of fear. How can you witness, how can you bear, how can you get out when you have become used to locked doors. But that is the good news. Jesus is able to penetrate even locked doors and locked hearts.

If I were Jesus, I would really look for those disciples and ask them, 'Ok now, where were you when I needed you?' This is a moment of reckoning. But thank God, I am not Jesus Christ, otherwise, the story would have changed radically. And remember one of them was not present. Thomas. A week later Jesus appears to them with Thomas in attendance. And look at what Jesus said, 'Look at my wounds, touch my wounds, put your hand into the wounds of my side and believe'.

My dear brothers and sisters, even in the victory of the resurrection, the wounds of Christ remain. Let us not think that the resurrection means an elimination of all wounds and scars. No. The risen body of Christ carries those wounds. He showed them to the disciples. He tells them to touch those wounds. To remind them that he was wounded because of his mercy and compassion to the poor. When you are merciful and compassionate to the poor, you will be crucified. You will not be understood all the time. If you exercise mercy and compassion, be ready to be wounded. And those wounds are also reminders to the disciples, 'you betrayed me but I don't take it against you'. Because immediately after showing those wounds, he tells them, 'Peace be with you' and he even sends them out to mission. I am tempted to tell Jesus. 'Jesus, have you not learnt your lesson? These are the people who left you alone and now you entrust to them this mission of spreading to the ends of the world the good news. Can you rely on them?' Well, he sends them the Holy Spirit, to assist them.

But really, I guess for all us, the words to the disciples, especially to Thomas, look at my wounds, touch my wounds. And after that, Thomas said, My Lord and my God. The wounds of Jesus continue to be present in the wounds of the world. In the wounds of society of men and women and I can hear Jesus telling all of us here, especially to the church in Singapore. Look at those wounds. Touch those wounds.

One author a theologian Thomas Halik said, 'Those who do not want to look at the wounds of other people, and those who do not want to touch the wounds of other people have no right to say, 'My lord and my God''. Quite shocking statement. He says Christian Faith should not be based on an illusion. It should not be delusionary. It is by touching the wounds of others that's where you declare, I believe in God and see whether you can still say I believe in God. It is easier to say I believe in God when you have bread to eat, when you know your security system will provide for you. But when there is nothing, only tears and wounds, can you still say, 'I believe in my Lord, and my God'?

The first time I read those lines from Thomas Halik, he won the Templeton prize, I spent sleepless nights. Really. Is my profession of faith real?

But then we realized we don't want to see wounds, we don't want to touch wounds because we are afraid of our own wounds. We would rather pretend that they are the wounded, but we are not. But when we have accepted as a missionary style, a method, seeing and touching the wounds of Jesus in

the wounds of other people, then we should be ready to confront our own wounds. And our society is, the global society is becoming an expert in denying wounds, in denying death, in denying mortality and vulnerability. Many of us think that if we have the best insurance policy, you and your children's children will be secure. Oh come on. Some believe that if the airbag in your car is the best that you will live forever. No. Some believe that if you enroll in the best fitness programme, Gym, Zumba that you will live forever. Oh no, please. Even if you have 20 CCTV cameras in your house, they may help but we are made to believe that we can settle that and then you can live a life without wounds. No. No.

You know, brothers and sisters, if we deny wounds, and this is from Roberto Goizueta, another theologian. He said, if we deny our wounds, we would refuse to see the wounds of other people and this is a sad thing, we might start inflicting wounds on others. A person who does not accept one's woundedness might start inflicting wounds on others. Because by denying our woundedness and our need for God's mercy and the mercy of other people, our hearts become hard. Then we fail to understand. We fail to become compassionate, we become impatient and then we become agents of hurt rather than of healing.

So those of you who have like domestics, or care-givers, and they forget something, please before getting angry, ask yourself, how about you? Do you remember everything? You are also forgetting. But if you admit that you are forgetful, then you would understand, why your maid also forgets. I heard the story of a boy who told his grandfather. He said, Grandpa, I admire you and grandma, at your age you are still very romantic to each other, you call her 'darling'. And the grandfather said, well, it is because I have forgotten the name of your grandma so I call her darling. So the next time, those of you who are married, the next time your spouse calls you darling, say, 'Stop, what is my name?'. Even if you forget the name even of your wife, of your husband and the name of your children. Sometimes you call all the names before you hit on the right name. Who are you not to understand the wound of another person. You are my own. You don't shout at your care-giver, but instead you say, don't worry. I understand, you forget, I also forget, we belong to each other.

Last year, one of my professors in the seminary, and by the way Msgr Philip Heng was one of my former student in the seminary. One of our professors, Fr Schumacher, tall American who taught Church history, he died last year. But before he died, he sent word if I could see him in the infirmary. So I went. it was a Holy Saturday, Black Saturday afternoon. I entered the room and Fr started crying. He was sobbing like a child and the nurse said whenever former students or friends come to visit, he gets emotional. So I approached him and tried to stroke him, when the sobbing subsided, he looked at me and with a smile he said, 'Oh Chito (that is how they call me), Chito, you used to sleep in my classes'. And that is true, some of my best sleep happened in his class. Not that I am not interested in history but I don't know why. And I said, 'Oh father, I am sorry if I caused you distress'. If Jesus had seven last words, would these be the last words of father? Chito, you used to sleep in my class. One of his last words on earth. And I said, 'Father I'm, sorry if I caused you distress when I was your student'. He said 'No worry, you did well. But now look at you, you are now a Cardinal'. And you know that whole afternoon up to the Easter vigil, that became my meditation. What was father telling me?

And the message that I got, through father, the Lord is telling me, Chito, we know you. We know you. You may be a cardinal, people admire you, you are put on the pedestal, but we know you. You slept in class. And if ever, ever, you got ordained a priest and later on became a bishop and now a cardinal, it is because of the mercy of God, and the understanding of so many people, professors, parishioners who wasted their love and understanding on a sleepy...

So because of that, I am still teaching, when I see students sleeping, I don't wake them up. I mean, I say, who knows, who knows, maybe the angels are telling them something much more important than I am. Or during Masses, who know, after the proclamation of the gospel, during homily, some people would sit down and I see them, they close their eyes, and I said ah they will mediate, they will pray and I feel elated. Then after a few minutes I see them ...(nodding), and I say oh no, they are ... on no... (they are asleep). I don't get mad, in fact I say I see myself there. I see my wounds, I also struggle keeping awake during lectures and Masses. This is a small question but I have to be reminded of my own wounds. One priest asked me, your Eminence, I used to sleep also in class when I was a seminarian. Do you think I could become a cardinal also someday? I said, that is not for me to give.

But really, we heard from the reports, even in a country as well-organised and socially sensitive as Singapore, we have so many wounded people. Look at those wounds, touch those wounds the way Jesus invited his disciples and there proclaim the presence of the Lord. They are no longer strangers, the hungry, the thirsty, the homeless, the naked, because they bear the wounds of Christ. The Christ who bore our wounds. The Christ who will say you are mine and that is why we are not afraid.

Let me close, I am sure you are hungry. You are. I am not. But I want to be compassionate.

You know as president of Caritas Internationalis, I go around the world but I said, 'Wow, I have been to so many countries but I have not visited some of the tourist attractions in those countries'. I go to refugee camps, I go to detention centres, I go to shelters of illegal migrants. I just came from Nepal, we visited the villages destroyed by the earthquake a year ago. But you see, some people ask me, 'Oh you are losing weight'. Yes, travelling takes its toll also, but I guess it is also, you see a lot of misery, you see a lot of wounds. You touch wounds.

In the refugee camp in Greece, in Idomeni, on the border with Macedonia, you smell misery, you smell festering wounds, really. But it is in those wounded places, that you see also signs of hope. And the poor, wounded teaching us what mercy, compassion and true faith means.

In that camp for refugees in Greece, in Idomeni, they told me, 'Your Eminence you are lucky, this is fairly slow day, slow day, because only 1,000 refugee came every hour'. From Sierra, Iraq, Afghanistan, that is already a slow day.

You see families and your heart really breaks. You know, to the well-off and secure, we don't wish war on anyone or that type of crisis, but one lesson that I learn from them, when you have to escape for your life, you bring really nothing. You bring only the clothing that you have and the most precious, the family. That is what they have, just the family.

So we went round, interviewing. When it time for me to go, I asked, I interviewed the woman who was running the relief, the distribution of food. She was the vice-mayor of the village. So I asked her, is this part of your job description, is it part of the role, the job of the vice-mayor to manage the distribution of goods. And she said, no, this is volunteer work for me. I said 'Why, does the vice-mayor here not have enough things to do that you added on to yourself more responsibilities? You volunteer for this'. Then she said, 'My ancestors were refugees. They are brothers and sisters. I will never abandon them'. I said, I thought I went there to encourage them, to give them lessons in faith and hope and compassion and mercy. She was the one who was teaching me this communion. Do I see a brother, a sister, do I remember the wounds of my ancestors and do I see those same wounds in the wounds of the people now. And so she referred to them. 'They'. She did not say 'These'. They are my brothers and sisters.

And then I started looking for the exit and I got lost. Oh I would be left alone here. My companions from Caritas would leave me alone. So I asked, 'Where is the exit?'. And the woman said, here. I was almost there. But I did not see the sign. I was almost beneath the sign, the exit. And I said, How could I have missed this? Of course it is in Greece and it is written in Greek. But we studied in the seminary biblical Greek so we could read Greek, so I said, Oh Chito, you are sleeping again. How could you have missed it?

EXODUS. Exodus. The way out. Exodus. And I was standing beneath that sign and I sent a text to the secretary general of Caritas Internationalis, Michel Roy, saying 'Oh Michel, I am standing beneath the sign which says 'Exodus' and he responded, 'Then God must be there'. Yes, God is here. Among these wounded people, you see the signs of hope. How they care for their families, how they see a brother and sister. No more strangers. Yes, God is here.

Thank you very much for your patience. Thank you.