

**HOMILY OF HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
MASS FOR THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE DEATH OF MSGR. LUIGI GIUSSANI
TUESDAY OF THE SEVENTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME
OUR LADY OF LOURDES PARISH – BETHESDA, MARYLAND
FEBRUARY 25, 2025**

In conveying to you the spiritual closeness and affection of Pope Francis, I also thank you, in a special way at this time, for the prayers that you are offering him. We heard in the reading from Sirach:

My son, when you come to serve the LORD, [...] prepare yourself for trials.
[Be] undisturbed in time of adversity. [...] Accept whatever befalls you, when sorrowful, be steadfast, and in crushing misfortune be patient; [...] Trust God and God will help you; trust in him, and he will direct your way; keep his fear and grow old therein.¹

Like Father Giussani, Pope Francis has emphasized that our life of faith is an encounter with Christ. Even before the coming of Christ in the flesh, the wisdom of Sirach recognized that suffering was part of relationship with the living God. Then Christ came to earth in the person of Jesus, and he did not avoid teaching his followers about the Cross. At one point St. Peter rejected this message, thus earning for himself the title “satan”. In today’s Gospel the disciples do not understand the message any better, and they remain mute with fear. When the silence becomes too dark for them, they distract themselves with something that they know more about: ambition and human praise. And so Jesus teaches them a lesson about being the last and the least. The child whom he places in their midst and embraces: this is the one who knows what it is to be close to Jesus. The child knows that he has no claim to

¹ *Sirach* 2:1-6.

greatness. And if the child is silent, it is because he is listening to what Jesus says. This is what it means to have faith. As Giussani wrote in *The Religious Sense*:

“And here is the alternative in which man risks himself, even if almost unconsciously: either you face reality wide open, loyally, with the bright eyes of a child, calling a spade a spade, embracing its entire presence, even its meaning; either this, or you place yourself in front of reality, defend yourself against it, almost with your arms flung in front of your eyes to ward off unwelcomed and unexpected blows.”

When a Christian “suffers well”, it means that he or she resists that very common temptation to “defend ourselves” against the Cross. Sufferings will come to us, no matter what our attitude is toward them. The person with a Christian attitude is the person who learns to practice what we could call “surrender” or “acceptance”.

Pope Francis has admitted that he can be an “impatient patient”. And yet, at this time he is giving us the catechesis on suffering. Not by giving a talk, but by enduring his condition and accepting the care that he needs. What suffering brings us all back to—from the Pope all the way down to the ordinary person—is what Father Giussani used as the image of the human person’s fundamental posture before God: the beggar. Giussani wrote: “We are truly ourselves when we realize that we are mendicants, totally dependent on the One who makes us.”² “To recognize oneself as a beggar,” he said, “means to recognize that we are not self-sufficient, that we need to be given everything, beginning with the fact that we exist.”³

In speaking about the virtue of patience in a General Audience last year, Pope Francis acknowledges this truth about our fundamental dependence on God. He said that patience is “a calling” which

“demands that we go against the tide with respect to today’s widespread mentality, dominated by rushing and by [wanting] ‘everything straight away’, in which, rather than waiting for situations to mature, people are

² Luigi Giussani, *The Journey to Truth Is an Experience*.

³ Giussani, *Christ, God’s Companionship with Man*.

put under pressure, in the expectation that they will change immediately.”

But the Pope continues:

“Let us not forget that rushing and impatience are enemies of spiritual life. Why? God is love, and those who love do not tire, they are not irascible; they do not give ultimatums. God is patient, God knows how to wait.”⁴

A beggar, to go back to Giussani’s image, must wait. But as beggars before God, we know that the one from whom we beg has already desired to give us all that we need before we even asked. This is the kind of beggar that Jesus teaches us to be: a beggar who is also a son, who trusts in a Father who loves him and who loves to provide for him. Even in the desert, that place of greatest deprivation and trial, the Son still depends completely on the Father, and waits upon him in absolute trust.

As we approach the season of Lent, it is good for us to try again what Jesus showed us, first in the desert, and later on the Cross. That spirit, that “heart”, of trust and dependence on God. The Book of Sirach calls for it, and Jesus models it by his perfect humanity and Sonship. In our Eucharist today, we eat and drink the body and blood of Christ as a way of being united to the heart of Christ: a heart filled with patience, and a heart that can endure the Cross with hope.

As Giussani said: “The real protagonist of history is the beggar: Christ who begs for man’s heart, and man’s heart that begs for Christ.”⁵

⁴ Pope Francis, General Audience of 27 March 2024.

⁵ Testimony of Msgr. Luigi Giussani at the Meeting of Pope John Paul II with Ecclesial Movements and New Communities, Rome, 30 May 1998.