

cided that we should try to counter this situation. We made an agreement among ourselves and called it a “pact of mercy”. We decided that every morning we would see the people we met at home, at school, at work, etc. as new, not calling to mind their faults at all but covering everything with love. It was a strong and challenging commitment, made by all of us together, that helped us to always be the first to love, in imitation of the merciful God, who forgives and forgets.’

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Luke 6: 41

Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?

Jesus had come down from the mountain where he had spent the night in prayer and then had chosen his apostles. When he reached a flat place, he began to preach to them, beginning with the proclamation of the Beatitudes.

Luke’s and Matthew’s gospels differ: in Luke’s text there are only four Beatitudes and they concern the poor, the hungry, the suffering and the afflicted, with the addition of as many admonitions against the rich, the satiated and the arrogant (Cf. Lk. 6: 20-26).

Jesus revealed God’s special love for the poor when he was in the synagogue at Nazareth and, filled with the Spirit of the Lord, he proclaimed that his mission was to bring glad tidings to the poor, deliverance to the captives and freedom to the oppressed. Jesus went on to exhort the dis-

ciples to love even their enemies (cf. Lk. 6: 27-35); a message that finds its ultimate inspiration in the behaviour of the heavenly Father: 'Be merciful, as your Father is merciful' (Lk. 6: 36).

This statement is also the starting point for what follows: 'Do not judge and you will not be judged; do not condemn and you will not be condemned; forgive and you will be forgiven' (Lk. 6: 37). Jesus then goes on to reprimand the listeners by using a deliberately disproportionate image:

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Jesus truly knows our heart. How often in everyday life do we have the sad experience of finding it easy to harshly criticise other people for their errors and weaknesses without taking into account that in doing so, we attribute to ourselves a prerogative that belongs to God alone? The fact is that in order to 'remove the plank' from our own eye, we need that humility that comes from the realisation that we are sinners continually in need of God's forgiveness. Only people who have the courage to notice their own 'plank' and what they personally need in order to change for the better, will be able to understand without judging or exaggerating, the frailties and weaknesses in themselves and in other people.

Nonetheless, Jesus does not invite us to close our eyes to what is happening around us and just let things run their course. He wants his followers to help each other as they progress along the path to a new life. The apostle Paul also frequently reminds us to show concern for and correct those who are idle and disruptive, to encourage the disheartened, to help the weak and to be patient with everyone (cf. 1 Ts 5: 14). Only love is capable of serving others this way.

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How can we put this word of life into practice? In addition to what has already been said, during this Lenten season we can ask Jesus to teach us to see others as he sees them, as God sees them. And God sees with the eyes of the heart because he always gazes upon us with love.

To help each other even more, we could restore a practice that was decisive for the first group of Foculare girls in Trent. Chiara Lubich once told a group of Muslim friends, '*At the beginning, it was not always easy to love in a radical way. Even among us, dust could settle on our relationships and unity could weaken. This happened, for example, when we became aware of the faults, the imperfections of others and we judged them and so our mutual love diminished. One day, we de-*