

## Presentation of the Apostolic Exhortation “*Dilexi te*”

**Fr. Frédéric-Marie Le Méhauté**

### Taking Seriously the Love of Christ...from the last

The point of departure of *Dilexi te* is the love of God for a weak community, “exposed to violence and contempt” (1). The pope recalls that beyond definitions of poverty, “the poor are not so by chance nor by reason of a blind and bitter destiny” (14). There are “sinful structures that create extreme poverty and inequalities” (90-98). Our attention should go to these “weakest, most miserable and most suffering” persons (2) and in particular to women, sometimes “doubly poor” (12). It is not only a matter of combatting the structural causes of poverty, but also of concretely joining those who are often far from our attention, to live “with them and like them” (101).

We must be realistic: “We feel more at ease without the poor” (114). They upset our habits; they make us face human limits that we prefer to ignore. The pope invites us to change our gaze. The poor are not only a problem. They “are a family matter”; they are “ours” (104), “brothers and sisters to welcome” (56) because God himself chose them first. “It is to them that the word of hope and liberation of the Lord is first addressed” (21). This privileged choice of God can make us feel uneasy. We would prefer an impartial God. Certainly, salvation is for everyone. But it does not come to us outside of concrete relationships (52). Where our mundane logic constructs the world from the point of view of the strong and rejects those who cannot participate, the logic of God starts with the excluded with the “stone rejected” (Ps 117:22) to make his Kingdom come.

Engagement with the poor is, therefore, not only a consequence of our faith. It is an epiphany, “an almost liturgical act” (61) because “one cannot separate the worship of God from attention to the poor” (40). “In this appeal to recognize him in the poor and the suffering, is revealed the heart of Christ himself” (3). “The love of the poor (...) is the evangelical guarantee of a Church faithful to the heart of God” (103) and a community that tries “to stay tranquil without trying in a creative way to assist” the poor is destined to lose its evangelical vigor (113),

*Dilexi te* recalls the need to engage *for* the poor, to give *to the* poor, in particular through almsgiving (115-119). But it insists that we learn to act *with* them. The acceleration of contemporary problems “is not only to be endured but also confronted and analyzed by the

poor” (82). This theme must be insisted on: the poor have a *thought*. That is, they can be actors and not only “objects of our compassion” (79) or of our politics, that they can help us analyze problems and especially that they are carriers of true solutions. Understanding this *from their point of view* is essential because “reality is better seen from the margins and [that] the poor are given a particular intelligence, indispensable to the Church and humanity” (82). Learning this permits us to better perceive the worldly logic at work in society, in the Church. It is from this understanding that *Dilexi te* denounces a politics and an economy dominated by a “happy minority” (92) that monopolizes riches and imposes “sacrifices on people to achieve certain objectives that concern the powerful” (93).

In summary, *Dilexi te* articulates a theology of revelation that gushes out mercy towards the most poor, an ecclesiology of service as a criterion of truth, and a social ethic that joins a hand stretched out to fight for justice. The last words are programmatic for a Church “that puts no limits on love, that knows no enemies to fight but only men and women to love” (120). Each person in difficulty should be able to hear individually “I have loved you.” This is the promise and our compass to follow and “imitating the poor Christ, naked and despised” (64) to construct a society and a Church where “no one should feel abandoned any more” (21).

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## Biography

Originally an engineer in France and Japan, he entered the Friars Minor and was sent to people in precarious states: street people, fourth world, street children in the Congo...Listening to them molded his research in theology. In 2021, he defended a thesis to try to understand the “mysterious wisdom of the poor” from the perspective of Christians who share the Word of God with people in precarious situations, He has given conferences to the Facultés Loyola Paris. Since April 2025, he is the provincial Minister of the Franciscan Province of France-Belgium

One of his publications: *Révéle aux tout-petits. Une théologie à l'écoute des plus pauvres*, Paris, Cerf, 2022 ; Italian translation: *Rivelato ai poveri, Una teologia in ascolto dei più poveri*, Rome, Castelvechi, 2023. [English translation of the title: *Revealed to the little ones. A theology listening to the poorest*]