



By Fr. Alex Castro, A.A.

For five days last January, we were blessed, we were moved, we were humbled, and we were challenged by the visit of our Holy Father Pope Francis.

Indeed his visit brought about the Lord's call for "Mercy and Compassion" which was the theme of his visit.

As I reflect on his speeches during his pastoral visit, it seems like he wanted to present to us a Program of Mercy and Compassion which we can use during this season of Lent.

First and foremost, this program is centered on Jesus Christ's mercy and compassion. He repeatedly reminded the faithful that his visit was not about him; it is all about Jesus Christ. In his homily at the emotion-filled mass in Tacloban City, the Holy Father emphasized that "I come to tell you that Jesus is Lord and He never lets us down. He is there for you. He is capable of understanding us...he is capable of crying with us, capable of walking with us in the most difficult moments of our life."

Moreover, this program is experienced in solidarity, to walk with those who suffer even in pain. This he revealed in that same mass: "When I saw from Rome that catastrophe I felt that I had to be here...I'm here." This pain silenced his heart as he said: "All I can do is keep silent, and I walk with you all with my silent heart".

Finally, this program should lead to conversion and allow God to surprise us. This surprise he said in his Encounter with the Youth at UST “shakes the ground beneath our feet, and make us insecure, but they move us forward in the right direction”. This conversion should also lead us to become “beggars” by learning not only to give but to receive by “learning how to be evangelized by the poor, by those we help, the sick, the orphans – they have so much to give us.”

These are but a few of what he said during his visit, but they challenge us to reflect, to move and to act.

May they help us in all our deeds during this season of Lent, and to live out our “vocation to be witnesses and missionaries of the Joy of the Gospel in Asia and in the whole world” sustaining the “Pope Francis effect” that moved our nation during his pastoral visit.