

The Military & Hospitaller Order of St Lazarus of Jerusalem  
Grand Master: H.E. Don Francisco de Borbon Graf von Hardenberg GCLJ



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Ecclesiastical Grand Prior

My dear Brothers and Sisters

Lent 2026

**Beggars and lepers all!**

For the season of Lent we bury our Alleluias, hold back on singing the Gloria in our liturgies, and limit ourselves to the one plea before our heavenly Father. 'Kyrie Eleison'.

It surely ought to be my hope each Ash Wednesday, that by the next I will need a little less of the Lord's mercy than I needed hitherto. That 'his mercy endureth forever' is a truth to be trusted but never presumed upon, never taken for granted. Our spiritual efforts during Lent and beyond Lent are not to be about self-improvement or personal growth – leave that for your New Year resolutions - but are properly earthed in a humble desire to cause less grief and pain to our Blessed Lord. Your desire not to add to the wounds that continuously afflict him, is a sign of your authentic love for him.

Yes, we will always stand in need of mercy this side of heaven, but by Grace and grit, a lovely old fashioned English word to describe determination, little by little we can live a life more conformed to his will and so be a blessing to Him. Any desire to live this way is a sign that Grace is already at work in us and can be a sign to those we encounter that the risen Lord is present in our lives and can be in theirs.

I am increasingly drawn to what can be described as a spiritual exercise of St Augustine, who describes the Christian life as an 'exercise of holy desire'. For Augustine that includes putting our loves in the right order, the '*ordo amoris*'. It means discovering what matters most and fashioning one's life accordingly, embracing a disciplined hierarchy of affection, a sequence that always begins with the First Commandment. I think Lent is a good time for such a re-ordering!

In the Gospels it is generally left to the beggars and the lepers to cry out to the Saviour for mercy. Whenever I hear such gospel passages, whether it be the ten lepers of Luke 17 or blind Bartimeus, or the two blind men of Matthew 9, I try to listen for the desperation in their voices, the hope in their voices, the humility in their voices. In the case of the blind men, in

response to their plea for mercy, Jesus asks them a direct question, “Do you believe I am able to do this?” That is, do you believe in my mercy?

Trust to that Divine Mercy! And be merciful to others. When I see the evident need for mercy in the lives of others, I dare not stand on any pedestal looking down on them. I must avoid harsh judgements. I must be merciful, and in the spirit of Augustine whose Rule was so formative for our Order in its beginnings make my prayer, “Stretch my heart O God!”. It was that same great bishop of Hippo, who in one of his sermons reveals his inside knowledge of the human condition, his own condition:

*‘When you hear the voice of the beggar, remember that before God, you yourself are a beggar’*

With blessings and the assurance of prayers for this holy season.

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