

The Newsletter of the Catholic Commission for Social Justice Issue 19, October 2016

MOMENTS OF MERCY

CCSJ's Reflections for Justice, Peace and Community Week during the Year of Mercy
October 22 – October 29, 2016

Theme: Living as credible witnesses to God's Mercy



A little bit of mercy makes the world less cold and more just (Pope Francis)

Introduction by Leela Ramdeen, Chair, CCSJ: CCSJ hopes that these reflections will provide a useful resource for individuals and groups. This year *Justice, Peace and Community Week (JPCW)* falls within the Extraordinary Holy Year of Mercy which was declared by Pope Francis and which commenced with the opening of the Holy Door at St Peter's on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception on December 8, 2015. It will conclude on November 20, 2016 – the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe. The writer, Robert Moynihan, rightly said that “What Pope Francis is doing by calling for this Jubilee Year of Mercy is to offer to all Christians the blessing of obtaining mercy by having and showing mercy to others.”

Our Theme for JPCW is: *Living as credible witnesses to God's Mercy*. We say that we are followers of Christ; we say that we believe that Jesus is “the way, and the truth and the life” (Jn. 14:5), but how are we following? What are we doing to Evangelize the culture? Do we know what an Evangelized culture would look like? Once we realise that Jesus is all that our “hungering” spirits need, then we will learn to be merciful as our Father in heaven is merciful (Luke 6:36). Let us heed the heartfelt plea of Pope Francis who said last year: “How greatly I desire that all those places where the Church is present, especially our parishes and our communities, may become *islands of mercy* in the midst of the sea of indifference!” This plea should resonate with us since we are people of the Beatitudes.

Inter alia, discipleship requires us to *put on the mind of Christ* (Phil. 2:5); to SEE-JUDGE-ACT – using our Scriptures and the teachings of the Magisterium to guide our thoughts and actions, for example, the words in Luke 4: 18 -19 are clear: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind; to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.” We are the Body of Christ in the world and each of us must strive to live our faith by acting on the biblical mandate given to us in Luke above.

In his Prayer for the Year of Mercy, Pope Francis reminds us that we “are the face of the invisible Father, of the God who manifests his power above all by forgiveness and mercy: let the Church be your visible face in the world, its Lord risen and glorified...Send your Spirit and consecrate every one of us with its anointing, so that the Jubilee of Mercy may be a year of grace from the Lord, and your Church, with renewed enthusiasm, may bring good news to the poor, proclaim liberty to captives and the oppressed, and restore sight to the blind”. If we are the hands and feet of the living God, we must demonstrate that the corporal and spiritual works of mercy are integral parts of our very being.

We are living in a time when powerful forces are seeking to push religion off the public stage. In this time of crisis, with so many social ills to be addressed, we must not be armchair Christians. As Bishop Robert Barron has said: “...the ultimate purpose of church people is not to hunker down behind walls, but rather to flood the world with the ideas and practices that they have cultivated...Christians must vigorously resist the modern prejudice in favour of a privatized religion...The Church must come out from behind its walls – non-violently to be sure – but with confidence and panache, in order to share its life everywhere and with everyone.”

Let our Catholic light shine in the face of rampant secularism, individualism, selfishness, and moral relativism. Let us demonstrate that we are credible witnesses to our Faith. And let the Church's social doctrine guide our path. As St Pope John Paul II said: “The teaching and spreading of her social doctrine are part of the Church's evangelizing mission. Since it is a doctrine aimed at guiding people's behaviour, it consequently gives rise to a ‘commitment to justice,’ according to each individual's role, vocation, and circumstances.” (The Social Concern of the Church, n.41).

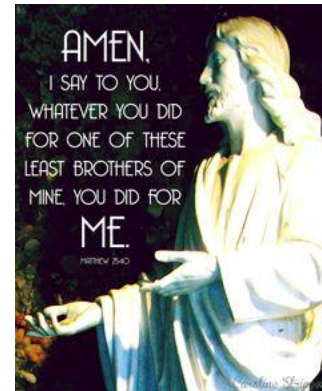
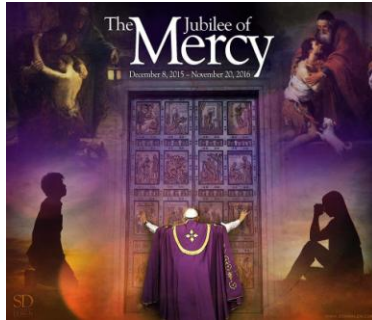
MOMENTS OF MERCY



JUBILEE
OF MERCY

Mercy:
the bridge that connects
God and **man**,
opening our **hearts**
to the **hope**
of being **loved** forever
despite
our *sinfulness*. 
-Pope Francis

- I have trusted in Your mercy; My heart shall rejoice in Your salvation. (Psalm 13:5)
- The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting. (Psalm 13:17)
- Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and your steadfast love, for they have been from of old (Psalm 25:6)
- Have mercy on me, O God, in your goodness, in your great tenderness wipe away my faults; wash me clean of my guilt, purify me from my sin. (Psalm 51: 1-2)
- Think of God’s mercy, my brothers, and worship him, I beg you, in a way that is worthy of thinking beings, by offering your living bodies as a holy sacrifice, truly pleasing to God. Do not model yourselves on the behaviour of the world around you, but let your behaviour change, modeled by your new mind. This is the only way to discover the will of God and know what is good, what it is that God wants, what is the perfect thing to do. (Romans 12:1-2)
- But God loved us with so much love that he was generous with Christ – it is through grace that you have been saved – and raised us up with him and gave us a place with him in heaven, in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:4-5)
- He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy (Titus 3:5)
- Let us be confident, then, in approaching the throne of grace, that we shall have mercy from him and find grace when we are in need of help. (Hebrews 4:16)



- Blessed the merciful: they shall have mercy shown them. (Matthew 5:7)
- Go and learn the meaning of the words: What I want is mercy, not sacrifice. And indeed I did not come to call the virtuous, but sinners. (Matthew 9:13)
- Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful (Luke 6:36)
- To understand Jesus' teachings about mercy, read *The Parables of Mercy in the Bible*:
 - Luke 15:1-32: the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son;
 - the two debtors and their creditor (Lk 7:41-43);
 - the good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37);
 - the rich man and the beggar Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31)'
 - the unjust judge and the persistent widow (Lk 18: 1-8)
 - the Pharisee and the publican in the temple (Lk 18:9-14).
- Extend your mercy towards others, so that there can be no one in need whom you meet without helping. For what hope is there for us if God should withdraw His Mercy from us? (Saint Vincent de Paul)
- For there are three ways of performing an act of mercy: the merciful word, by forgiving and by comforting; secondly, if you can offer no word, then pray - that too is mercy; and thirdly, deeds of mercy. And when the Last Day comes, we shall be judged from this, and on this basis we shall receive the eternal verdict. (1158) (St Faustina)
- What you are doing I cannot do, what I'm doing you cannot do, but together we are doing something beautiful for God, and this is the greatness of God's love for us — to give us the opportunity to become holy through the works of love that we do because holiness is not the luxury of the few. It is a very simple duty for you, for me — you in your position,

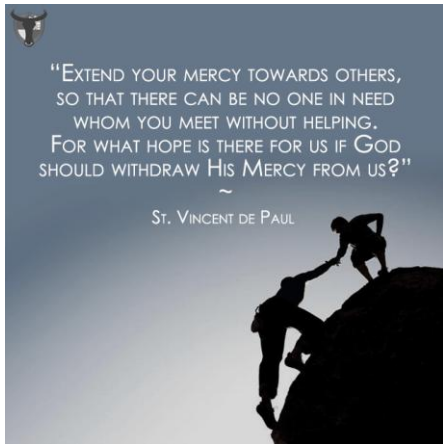
in your work and I and others, each one of us in the work, in the life that we have given our word of honor to God. . . . You must put your love for God in a living action (Blessed Teresa: Where There Is Love, There Is God).



- Let the risen Jesus enter your life – welcome him as a friend, with trust: he is life! If up till now you have kept him at a distance, step forward. He will receive you with open arms. If you have been indifferent take a risk; you won't be disappointed. If following him seems difficult, don't be afraid. Trust him, be confident that he is close to you, he is with you, and he will give you the peace you are looking for and the strength to live as he would have you do. (Pope Francis, Easter Vigil Mass, March 30, 2013)
- The Church must be a place of mercy freely given, where everyone can feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to live the good life of the Gospel. (Pope Francis, The Joy of the Gospel, 2013)
- Our faith in Christ, who became poor, and was always close to the poor and the outcast, is the basis of our concern for the integral development of society's most neglected members." (Pope Francis, The Joy of the Gospel, 2013)
- How good it feels to come back to him whenever we are lost! Let me say this once more: God never tires of forgiving us; we are the ones who tire of seeking his mercy. Christ, who told us to forgive one another “seventy times seven” (Mt 18:22) has given us his example: he has forgiven us seventy times seven. Time and time again he bears us on his shoulders. No one can strip us of the dignity bestowed upon us by this boundless and unfailing love. (Pope Francis, The Joy of the Gospel, 2013)
- What a beautiful truth of faith this is for our lives: the mercy of God! God's love for us is so great, so deep; it is an unfailing love, one which always takes us by the hand and supports us, lifts us up and leads us on. (Pope Francis, Homily, 7 April 2013)



- Let us remain with Christ—abiding in Christ—and let us always try to be one with him. Let us follow him; let us imitate him in his movement of love, in his going forth to meet humanity. Let us go forth and open doors. Let us have the audacity to mark out new paths for proclaiming the Gospel. (Pope Francis, Address, Sept 27, 2013)
- God is always waiting for us. He never grows tired. Jesus shows us this merciful patience of God so that we can regain confidence and hope — always!" (Pope Francis, Homily, April 7, 2013).
- I think we too are the people who, on the one hand, want to listen to Jesus, but on the other hand, at times, like to find a stick to beat others with, to condemn others. And Jesus has this message for us: mercy. I think — and I say it with humility — that this is the Lord's most powerful message: mercy. (Pope Francis, Homily on March 17, 2013)
- It is not easy to entrust oneself to God's mercy, because it is an abyss beyond our comprehension. But we must! ... "Oh, I am a great sinner!" "All the better! Go to Jesus: He likes you to tell him these things!" He forgets, He has a very special capacity for forgetting. He forgets, He kisses you, He embraces you and He simply says to you: "Neither do I condemn you; go, and sin no more" (Jn 8:11). (Pope Francis, Homily on March 17, 2013)
- Jesus' attitude is striking: we do not hear the words of scorn, we do not hear words of condemnation, but only words of love, of mercy, which are an invitation to conversation. "Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again." Ah! Brothers and Sisters, God's face is the face of a merciful father who is always patient. Have you thought about God's patience, the patience He has with each one of us? That is His mercy. He always has patience, patience with us, He understands us, He waits for us, He does not tire of forgiving us if we are able to return to Him with a contrite heart. "Great is God's mercy," says the Psalm. (Pope Francis, Angelus on March 17, 2013)

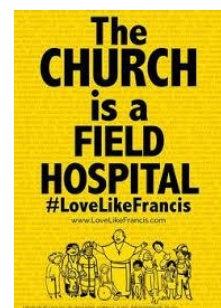


- In the past few days I have been reading a book by a Cardinal ... Cardinal Kasper said that feeling mercy, that this word changes everything. This is the best thing we can feel: it changes the world. A little mercy makes the world less cold and more just. We need to understand properly this mercy of God, this merciful Father who is so patient. ... Let us remember the Prophet Isaiah who says that even if our sins were scarlet, God's love would make them white as snow. This mercy is beautiful. (Pope Francis, Angelus on March 17, 2013).
- God's mercy can make even the driest land become a garden, can restore life to dry bones (cf. Ez 37:1-14). ... Let us be renewed by God's mercy, let us be loved by Jesus, let us enable the power of his love to transform our lives too; and let us become agents of this mercy, channels through which God can water the earth, protect all creation and make justice and peace flourish. (Pope Francis, Easter Urbi et Orbi message on March 31, 2013)



- Together let us pray to the Virgin Mary that she helps us ... to walk in faith and charity, ever trusting in the Lord's mercy; He always awaits us, loves us, has pardoned us with His Blood and pardons us every time we go to Him to ask His forgiveness. Let us trust in His mercy! (Pope Francis, Regina Caeli on Divine Mercy Sunday, April 7, 2013)

- In today's Gospel, the Apostle Thomas personally experiences this mercy of God. ... Thomas does not believe it when the other Apostles tell him: "We have seen the Lord." ... And how does Jesus react? With patience: Jesus does not abandon Thomas in his stubborn unbelief ... He does not close the door, He waits. And Thomas acknowledges his own poverty, his little faith. "My Lord and my God!": with this simple yet faith-filled invocation, he responds to Jesus' patience. He lets himself be enveloped by Divine Mercy; he sees it before his eyes, in the wounds of Christ's hands and feet and in His open side, and he discovers trust. (Pope Francis, Homily on Divine Mercy Sunday, April 7, 2013)
- Let us ... remember Peter: three times he denied Jesus, precisely when he should have been closest to him; and when he hits bottom he meets the gaze of Jesus who patiently, wordlessly, says to him: "Peter, don't be afraid of your weakness, trust in Me." Peter understands, he feels the loving gaze of Jesus and he weeps. How beautiful is this gaze of Jesus — how much tenderness is there! Brothers and sisters, let us never lose trust in the patience and mercy of God! (Pope Francis, Homily on Divine Mercy Sunday, April 7, 2013)
- I am always struck when I reread the parable of the merciful Father. ... The Father, with patience, love, hope and mercy, had never for a second stopped thinking about [his wayward son], and as soon as he sees him still far off, he runs out to meet him and embraces him with tenderness, the tenderness of God, without a word of reproach. ... God is always waiting for us, He never grows tired. Jesus shows us this merciful patience of God so that we can regain confidence and hope — always! (Pope Francis, Homily on Divine Mercy Sunday, April 7, 2013)



- God's patience has to call forth in us the courage to return to Him, however many mistakes and sins there may be in our life. ... It is there, in the wounds of Jesus, that we are truly secure; there we encounter the boundless love of His heart. Thomas understood this. Saint Bernard goes on to ask: But what can I count on? My own merits? No, "My

merit is God's mercy. I am by no means lacking merits as long as He is rich in mercy. If the mercies of the Lord are manifold, I too will abound in merits." This is important: the courage to trust in Jesus' mercy, to trust in His patience, to seek refuge always in the wounds of His love. (Pope Francis, Homily on Divine Mercy Sunday, April 7, 2013)

- No amount of “peace-building” will be able to last, nor will harmony and happiness be attained in a society that ignores, pushes to the margins or excludes a part of itself. A society of that kind simply impoverishes itself, it loses something essential. We must never, never allow the throwaway culture to enter our hearts! We must never allow the throwaway culture to enter our hearts, because we are brothers and sisters. No one is disposable! Let us always remember this: only when we are able to share do we become truly rich; everything that is shared is multiplied! Think of the multiplication of the loaves by Jesus! The measure of the greatness of a society is found in the way it treats those most in need, those who have nothing apart from their poverty! (Address by Pope Francis, July 25, 2013, Rio de Janeiro)



Corporal Works

- To feed the hungry;
- To give drink to the thirsty;
- To clothe the naked;
- To harbour the harbourless;
- To visit the sick;
- To ransom the captive;
- To bury the dead.

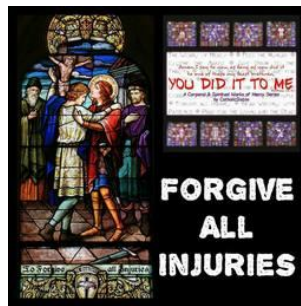
Spiritual Works

- To instruct the ignorant;
- To counsel the doubtful;
- To admonish sinners;
- To bear wrongs patiently;
- To forgive offences willingly;
- To comfort the afflicted;
- To pray for the living and the dead

- Situations can change; people can change. Be the first to seek to bring good. Do not grow accustomed to evil, but defeat it with good. (Address by Pope Francis, Rio de Janeiro, July 25, 2013)
- True mercy, the mercy God gives to us and teaches us, demands justice, it demands that the poor find the way to be poor no longer.” (Pope Francis, September 10, 2013)
- Mercy overcomes every wall, every barrier, and leads you to always seek the face of the man, of the person. And it is mercy which changes the heart and the life, which can regenerate a person and allow him or her to integrate into society in a new way. (Pope Francis, September 14, 2014)
- With our eyes fixed on Jesus and his merciful gaze, we experience the love of the Most Holy Trinity...His person is nothing but love, a love given gratuitously. The relationships he forms with the people who approach him manifest something entirely unique and

unrepeatable. The signs he works, especially in favor of sinners, the poor, the marginalized, the sick, and the suffering, are all meant to teach mercy. Everything in him speaks of mercy. Nothing in him is devoid of compassion. (Pope Francis, April 11, 2015)

- If we—all of us—accept the grace of Jesus Christ, he changes our heart and from sinners makes us saints. To become holy, we do not need to turn our eyes away and look somewhere else! No, no, that is not necessary. To become saints only one thing is necessary: to accept the grace that the Father gives us in Jesus Christ. There, this grace changes our heart. We continue to be sinners for we are weak, but with this grace which makes us feel that the Lord is good, that the Lord is merciful, that the Lord waits for us, that the Lord pardons us—this immense grace that changes our heart. (Pope Francis, Homily, March, 2016)



- As Archbishop of Port of Spain, I hope that, in understanding and living mercy, all of us, people of faith and goodwill, can work together to show God's mercy throughout our land (Archbishop Joseph Harris' Pastoral Letter)
- During this Holy Year of Mercy, I exhort each one of you to revisit the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy and commit yourselves to them as a concrete expressions of your desire to be as merciful as the Father who lets the sun shine on both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike...While we do these things however, Mercy demands that we ask ourselves certain questions: (CCC 2247) :
 - Why it is that in a land as rich as ours, there are so many who live in the degradation of poverty, depending on the spasmodic generosity of strangers for their daily bread?
 - Why is it that so many young families cannot afford decent lodging?
 - Why is it that so many of our people cannot access the health services they need or receive the basic medicines necessary for their well-being?

- Why are there so many homeless of all ages and ethnicities on our streets?
 - Why are our prisons becoming a growth industry, swallowing the lives of many young people, costing large sums of money, and becoming a school from which the “graduates” emerge more violent and destructive?
 - How is it that we have grown accustomed to this state of affairs? (Archbishop Joseph Harris’ Pastoral Letter)
- Pope Paul VI in an address to the United Nations said that the particular expertise that the Church had to offer the world was how to be human. This is a humanity measured on the perfect humanity of Christ, the Face of the Merciful Father. We, members of the Church and followers of Christ have a sacred responsibility to develop this expertise for the welfare of our brothers and sisters and for our own salvation. This Jubilee Year of Mercy is a special opportunity to gaze once more upon the Image of Christ, our Elder Brother so that we may emerge transformed into the likeness of Him upon whom we gaze. As we look at Christ, we see the Father, Who is my Shepherd, who rejoices over finding the lost sheep, the Prodigal Father, whose embrace, at once paternal and maternal, holds both the wandering son and the sour, cold-hearted elder son. As we look, we see ourselves, invited to return to that haven of peace and love from which only our persistence in sin debars us. Whether we have ‘dropped out’ of Church, or hide because we feel our deep unworthiness, or we are held back by our attachments and habits of laziness this is the moment to return home. More urgently perhaps, this call to conversion is addressed to the ‘good people’ who may have become complacent in their virtue. Christ gave his all in response to the Father’s love, this Jubilee year challenges us to do no less. (Archbishop Joseph Harris’ Pastoral Letter)

Extracts from Pope Francis’ Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy (April 11, 2015):

- I have proclaimed an *Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy* as a special time for the Church, a time when the witness of believers might grow stronger and more effective. (3)
- Jesus Christ is the face of the Father’s mercy. These words might well sum up the mystery of the Christian faith. Mercy has become living and visible in Jesus of Nazareth, reaching its culmination in him. The Father, “rich in mercy” (*Eph 2:4*), after having revealed his name to Moses as “a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness” (*Ex34:6*), has never ceased to show, in various ways throughout history, his divine nature. (1)

- We need constantly to contemplate the mystery of mercy. It is a wellspring of joy, serenity, and peace. Our salvation depends on it. Mercy: the word reveals the very mystery of the Most Holy Trinity. Mercy: the ultimate and supreme act by which God comes to meet us. Mercy: the fundamental law that dwells in the heart of every person who looks sincerely into the eyes of his brothers and sisters on the path of life. Mercy: the bridge that connects God and man, opening our hearts to the hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness. (2)
- When faced with the gravity of sin, God responds with the fullness of mercy. Mercy will always be greater than any sin, and no one can place limits on the love of God who is ever ready to forgive. (3)

"Mercy is in reality the core of the Gospel message; it is the name of God Himself, the face with which He reveals Himself in the Old Testament and fully in Jesus Christ, the Incarnation of creative and redemptive love."
- Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI



- It is proper to God to exercise mercy, and he manifests his omnipotence particularly in this way". Saint Thomas Aquinas' words show that God's mercy, rather than a sign of weakness, is the mark of his omnipotence. For this reason the liturgy, in one of its most ancient collects, has us pray: "O God, who reveal your power above all in your mercy and forgiveness ... "Throughout the history of humanity, God will always be the One who is present, close, provident, holy, and merciful. (6)

"Patient and merciful." These words often go together in the Old Testament to describe God's nature. His being merciful is concretely demonstrated in his many actions throughout the history of salvation where his goodness prevails over punishment and destruction. In a special way the Psalms bring to the fore the grandeur of his merciful action: "He forgives all your iniquity, he heals all your diseases, he redeems your life from the pit, he crowns you with steadfast love and mercy" (*Ps* 103:3-4). Another psalm, in an even more explicit way, attests to the concrete signs of his mercy: "He executes justice for the oppressed; he gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets the prisoners free; the Lord opens the eyes of the blind. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous. The Lord watches over the sojourners, he upholds the widow and the fatherless; but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin" (*Ps* 146:7-9). Here are some other expressions of the Psalmist: "He heals the brokenhearted, and binds up their

wounds... The Lord lifts up the downtrodden, he casts the wicked to the ground” (Ps 147:3, 6). In short, the mercy of God is not an abstract idea, but a concrete reality with which he reveals his love as of that of a father or a mother, moved to the very depths out of love for their child. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that this is a “visceral” love. It gushes forth from the depths naturally, full of tenderness and compassion, indulgence and mercy. (6) “For his mercy endures forever.” This is the refrain that repeats after each verse in Psalm 136 as it narrates the history of God’s revelation. (7)

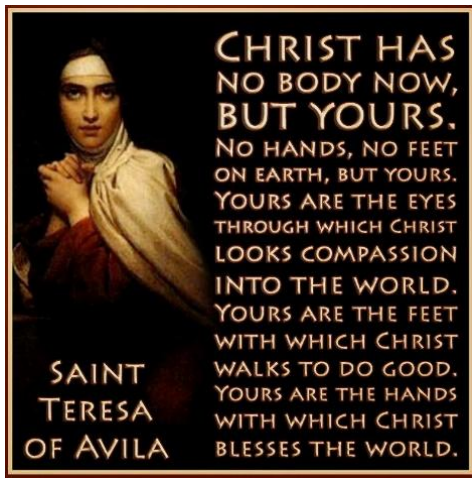


- His person is nothing but love, a love given gratuitously. The relationships he forms with the people who approach him manifest something entirely unique and unrepeatable. The signs he works, especially in favour of sinners, the poor, the marginalized, the sick, and the suffering, are all meant to teach mercy. Everything in him speaks of mercy. Nothing in him is devoid of compassion. (8)
- As we can see in Sacred Scripture, mercy is a key word that indicates God’s action towards us. He does not limit himself merely to affirming his love, but makes it visible and tangible. Love, after all, can never be just an abstraction. By its very nature, it indicates something concrete: intentions, attitudes, and behaviours that are shown in daily living. The mercy of God is his loving concern for each one of us. He feels responsible; that is, he desires our wellbeing and he wants to see us happy, full of joy, and peaceful. This is the path which the merciful love of Christians must also travel. As the Father loves, so do his children. Just as he is merciful, so we are called to be merciful to each other. (9)





- Mercy is the very foundation of the Church's life. All of her pastoral activity should be caught up in the tenderness she makes present to believers; nothing in her preaching and in her witness to the world can be lacking in mercy. The Church's very credibility is seen in how she shows merciful and compassionate love. The Church "has an endless desire to show mercy". Perhaps we have long since forgotten how to show and live the way of mercy. The temptation, on the one hand, to focus exclusively on justice made us forget that this is only the first, albeit necessary and indispensable step. But the Church needs to go beyond and strive for a higher and more important goal. On the other hand, sad to say, we must admit that the practice of mercy is waning in the wider culture. In some cases the word seems to have dropped out of use. However, without a witness to mercy, life becomes fruitless and sterile, as if sequestered in a barren desert. The time has come for the Church to take up the joyful call to mercy once more. It is time to return to the basics and to bear the weaknesses and struggles of our brothers and sisters. Mercy is the force that reawakens us to new life and instils in us the courage to look to the future with hope. (10)
- The Church is commissioned to announce the mercy of God, the beating heart of the Gospel, which in its own way must penetrate the heart and mind of every person. The Spouse of Christ must pattern her behaviour after the Son of God who went out to everyone without exception. In the present day, as the Church is charged with the task of the new evangelization, the theme of mercy needs to be proposed again and again with new enthusiasm and renewed pastoral action. It is absolutely essential for the Church and for the credibility of her message that she herself live and testify to mercy. Her language and her gestures must transmit mercy, so as to touch the hearts of all people and inspire them once more to find the road that leads to the Father. (12)



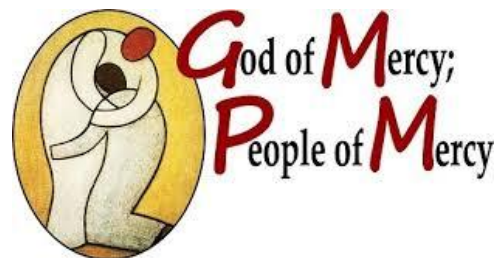
- It is my burning desire that, during this Jubilee, the Christian people may reflect on the *corporal and spiritual works of mercy*. It will be a way to reawaken our conscience, too often grown dull in the face of poverty. And let us enter more deeply into the heart of the Gospel where the poor have a special experience of God’s mercy. Jesus introduces us to these works of mercy in his preaching so that we can know whether or not we are living as his disciples. Let us rediscover these *corporal works of mercy*: to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, heal the sick, visit the imprisoned, and bury the dead. And let us not forget the *spiritual works of mercy*: to counsel the doubtful, instruct the ignorant, admonish sinners, comfort the afflicted, forgive offences, bear patiently those who do us ill, and pray for the living and the dead. (15)

We cannot escape the Lord’s words to us, and they will serve as the criteria upon which we will be judged: whether we have fed the hungry and given drink to the thirsty, welcomed the stranger and clothed the naked, or spent time with the sick and those in prison (cf. *Mt 25:31-45*). Moreover, we will be asked if we have helped others to escape the doubt that causes them to fall into despair and which is often a source of loneliness; if we have helped to overcome the ignorance in which millions of people live, especially children deprived of the necessary means to free them from the bonds of poverty; if we have been close to the lonely and afflicted; if we have forgiven those who have offended us and have rejected all forms of anger and hate that lead to violence; if we have had the kind of patience God shows, who is so patient with us; and if we have commended our brothers and sisters to the Lord in prayer. In each of these “little ones,” Christ himself is present. His flesh becomes visible in the flesh of the tortured, the crushed, the scourged, the malnourished, and the exiled... to be acknowledged, touched, and cared for by us. Let

us not forget the words of Saint John of the Cross: “as we prepare to leave this life, we will be judged on the basis of love”. (15)

- It would not be out of place at this point to recall the relationship between *justice* and *mercy*. These are not two contradictory realities, but two dimensions of a single reality that unfolds progressively until it culminates in the fullness of love. Justice is a fundamental concept for civil society, which is meant to be governed by the rule of law. Justice is also understood as that which is rightly due to each individual. In the Bible, there are many references to divine justice and to God as “judge”. In these passages, justice is understood as the full observance of the Law and the behaviour of every good Israelite in conformity with God’s commandments. Such a vision, however, has not infrequently led to legalism by distorting the original meaning of justice and obscuring its profound value. To overcome this legalistic perspective, we need to recall that in Sacred Scripture, justice is conceived essentially as the faithful abandonment of oneself to God’s will. (20)

For his part, Jesus speaks several times of the importance of faith over and above the observance of the law. It is in this sense that we must understand his words when, reclining at table with Matthew and other tax collectors and sinners, he says to the Pharisees raising objections to him, “Go and learn the meaning of ‘I desire mercy not sacrifice’. I have come not to call the righteous, but sinners” (*Mt* 9:13). Faced with a vision of justice as the mere observance of the law that judges people simply by dividing them into two groups – the just and sinners – Jesus is bent on revealing the great gift of mercy that searches out sinners and offers them pardon and salvation. One can see why, on the basis of such a liberating vision of mercy as a source of new life, Jesus was rejected by the Pharisees and the other teachers of the law. In an attempt to remain faithful to the law, they merely placed burdens on the shoulders of others and undermined the Father’s mercy. The appeal to a faithful observance of the law must not prevent attention from being given to matters that touch upon the dignity of the person. (20)

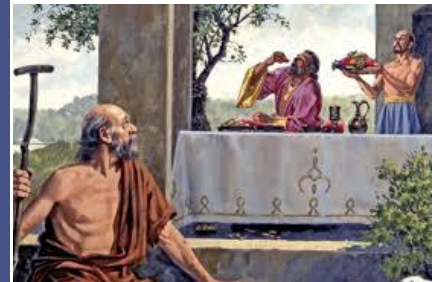
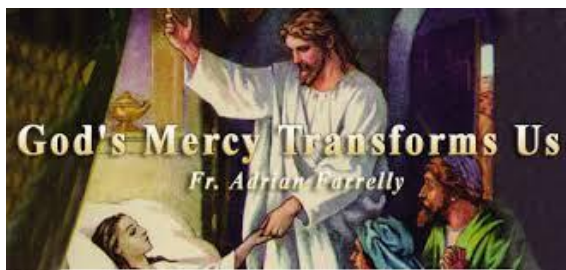


The appeal Jesus makes to the text from the book of the prophet Hosea – “I desire love and not sacrifice” (6:6) – is important in this regard. Jesus affirms that, from that time onward, the rule of life for his disciples must place mercy at the centre, as Jesus himself

demonstrated by sharing meals with sinners. Mercy, once again, is revealed as a fundamental aspect of Jesus' mission. This is truly challenging to his hearers, who would draw the line at a formal respect for the law. Jesus, on the other hand, goes beyond the law; the company he keeps with those the law considers sinners makes us realize the depth of his mercy. (20)

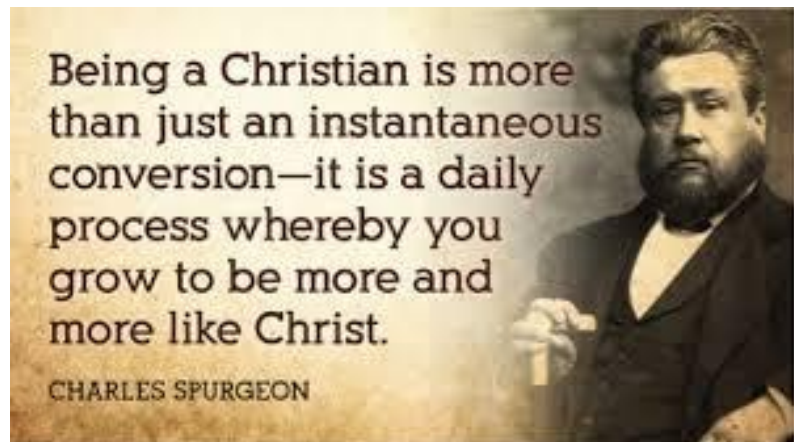
The Apostle Paul makes a similar journey. Prior to meeting Jesus on the road to Damascus, he dedicated his life to pursuing the justice of the law with zeal (cf. *Phil* 3:6). His conversion to Christ led him to turn that vision upside down, to the point that he would write to the Galatians: "We have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ, and not by works of the law, because by works of the law shall no one be justified" (2:16). (20)

Paul's understanding of justice changes radically. He now places faith first, not justice. Salvation comes not through the observance of the law, but through faith in Jesus Christ, who in his death and resurrection brings salvation together with a mercy that justifies. God's justice now becomes the liberating force for those oppressed by slavery to sin and its consequences. God's justice is his mercy (cf. *Ps* 51:11-16). (20)



- Mercy is not opposed to justice but rather expresses God's way of reaching out to the sinner, offering him a new chance to look at himself, convert, and believe. The experience of the prophet Hosea can help us see the way in which mercy surpasses justice. The era in which the prophet lived was one of the most dramatic in the history of the Jewish people. The kingdom was tottering on the edge of destruction; the people had not remained faithful to the covenant; they had wandered from God and lost the faith of their forefathers. According to human logic, it seems reasonable for God to think of rejecting an unfaithful people; they had not observed their pact with God and therefore deserved just punishment: in other words, exile. The prophet's words attest to this: "They shall not return to the land of Egypt, and Assyria shall be their king, because they have refused to return to me" (*Hos*11:5). And yet, after this invocation of justice, the prophet radically changes his speech and reveals the true face of God: "How can I give you up, O

Ephraim! How can I hand you over, O Israel! How can I make you like Admah! How can I treat you like Zeboiim! My heart recoils within me, my compassion grows warm and tender. I will not execute my fierce anger, I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come to destroy” (11:8-9). Saint Augustine, almost as if he were commenting on these words of the prophet, says: “It is easier for God to hold back anger than mercy”. And so it is. God’s anger lasts but a moment, his mercy forever. (21)



- If God limited himself to only justice, he would cease to be God, and would instead be like human beings who ask merely that the law be respected. But mere justice is not enough. Experience shows that an appeal to justice alone will result in its destruction. This is why God goes beyond justice with his mercy and forgiveness. Yet this does not mean that justice should be devalued or rendered superfluous. On the contrary: anyone who makes a mistake must pay the price. However, this is just the beginning of conversion, not its end, because one begins to feel the tenderness and mercy of God. God does not deny justice. He rather envelopes it and surpasses it with an even greater event in which we experience love as the foundation of true justice. We must pay close attention to what Saint Paul says if we want to avoid making the same mistake for which he reproaches the Jews of his time: “For, being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law, that every one who has faith may be justified” (Rom 10:3-4). God’s justice is his mercy given to everyone as a grace that flows from the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Thus the Cross of Christ is God’s judgement on all of us and on the whole world, because through it he offers us the certitude of love and new life. (21)
- Mary attests that the mercy of the Son of God knows no bounds and extends to everyone, without exception. Let us address her in the words of the *Salve Regina* ... so that she may never tire of turning her merciful eyes upon us, and make us worthy to contemplate the face of mercy, her Son Jesus. (24)

- ... may the Church echo the word of God that resounds strong and clear as a message and a sign of pardon, strength, aid, and love. May she never tire of extending mercy, and be ever patient in offering compassion and comfort. May the Church become the voice of every man and woman, and repeat confidently without end: “Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and your steadfast love, for they have been from of old” (Ps 25:6). (25)



“Mary, then, is the one who has the deepest knowledge of the mystery of God’s mercy. She knows its price; she knows how great it is. In this sense, we call her the Mother of Mercy: Our Lady of Mercy, or Mother of Divine Mercy...”
 - Saint Pope John Paul II

Misericordes sicut Pater! (Official Hymn for the Year of Mercy)

1. Give thanks to the Father, for He is good
 He created the world with wisdom
 He leads His people throughout history
 He pardons and welcomes His children.

2. Give thanks to the Son, Light of the Nations
 He loved us with a heart of flesh
 As we receive from Him, let us also give to Him
 Hearts open to those who hunger and thirst. **Misericordes sicut Pater! Misericordes sicut Pater!**

3. Let us ask the Spirit for the seven holy gifts
 Fount of all goodness and the sweetest relief
 Comforted by Him, let us offer comfort
 Love hopes and bears all things.

4. Let us ask for peace from the God of all peace
 The earth waits for the Good News of the Kingdom
 Joy and pardon in the hearts of the little ones
 The heavens and the earth will be renewed. **Misericordes sicut Pater! Misericordes sicut Pater!**



**PRAYER OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
FOR THE EXTRAORDINARY JUBILEE OF MERCY (Dec 8 2015 – Nov 20, 2016)**

Lord Jesus Christ, you have taught us to be merciful like the heavenly Father, and have told us that whoever sees you sees Him.

Show us your face and we will be saved.

Your loving gaze freed Zacchaeus and Matthew from being enslaved by money; the adulteress and Magdalene from seeking happiness only in created things; made Peter weep after his betrayal, and assured Paradise to the repentant thief.

Let us hear, as if addressed to each one of us, the words that you spoke to the Samaritan woman:

“If you knew the gift of God!”

You are the visible face of the invisible Father,

of the God who manifests his power above all by forgiveness and mercy:

let the Church be your visible face in the world, its Lord risen and glorified.

You willed that your ministers would also be clothed in weakness

in order that they may feel compassion for those in ignorance and error:

let everyone who approaches them feel sought after, loved, and forgiven by God.

Send your Spirit and consecrate every one of us with its anointing,

so that the Jubilee of Mercy may be a year of grace from the Lord,

and your Church, with renewed enthusiasm, may bring good news to the poor, proclaim liberty to captives and the oppressed, and restore sight to the blind.

We ask this of you, Lord Jesus, through the intercession of Mary, Mother of

Mercy; you who live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit for ever and ever. Amen.

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