



Peter's Denial

MERCY IS THE CONCRETE, DOWN TO EARTH EXPRESSION OF LOVE.

frequently, and the graces of the sacrament will be explained to all the faithful. The Pope urges, "Let us place the sacrament of Reconciliation at the centre once more in such a way that it will enable people to touch the grandeur of God's mercy with their own hands."

c) Lent will be a privileged moment to celebrate and experience God's mercy. On the Friday and Saturday preceding the fourth week of Lent the whole church will celebrate "24 hours for the Lord" with around the clock adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and personal devotions and reconciliation.

d) Missionaries of Mercy will be sent out to preach the gospel of mercy in every Diocese. These priests will have the authority to pardon even those sins reserved for the Holy See. As all priests they will be icons of the Father's mercy, welcoming home the lost.

e) A special Holy Year indulgence will be granted. Not only will our sins be forgiven in the sacrament of Reconciliation but also the negative effects of sin will also be washed away by the indulgent mercy of God through his Church.

f) We will also be invited to open our hearts to Mary, the Mother of Mercy. We will once again turn our hearts towards her eyes of mercy, and find the comfort and consolation which she brings to those most in need. And we will be calling on the intercession of St Faustina Kowalska, the great apostle of mercy, together with all the saints who can mediate to us the grace and mercy of Christ.

Pope Francis is hoping that this year of mercy will open our hearts more to those living on the fringes of society. He reminds us, "How many uncertain and painful situations there are in the world today! How many are the wounds borne by the flesh of those who have no voice because their cry is muffled and drowned out by the indifference of the rich!" He is hoping that we will feel called to reach out and begin to heal the wounds, bringing consolation to those most in need, being in solidarity with them and not being afraid to touch the suffering flesh of the most distressed and abandoned. We must hear the cry of the poor, since that is the heart of our merciful God. "Let us open our eyes and see the misery of the world, the wounds of our brothers and sisters who are denied their dignity, and let us recognize that we are compelled to heed their cry for help!" It will be a time to remember that we will ultimately be judged on whether we fed the hungry and gave drink to the thirsty, welcomed the stranger, clothed the naked, and spent time with the sick and those in prison (cf Mt 25:31-45).

The Pope intends this year of Mercy to be a step further towards being a Church "which is poor and for the poor". Jesus taught "Blessed are the merciful; they shall obtain mercy" (Mt 5:7). And James tells us "The merciful need have no fear of judgement. But there will be judgement without mercy for those who show no mercy" (Jas 2:12-13). God shows his "first mercy" to the poor. His heart is so much for the poor that "he became poor for our sake" (2Cor 8:9). Consequently the Church must make a primary option for the poor. In proclaiming the Good News to the poor we ourselves are evangelized. By being at home with the poor who belong to us as if they are family, we are more in touch with the suffering Christ. "We are called to find Christ in them, to lend our voice to their causes, but also to be their friends, to listen to them, to speak for them and to embrace their mysterious wisdom which God wishes to share with us through them." This is a far cry from any paternalistic patronage of the disadvantaged and marginalised. Rather it is a warm-hearted welcome of the poor, experiencing them as our people, and experiencing ourselves as one of them.

The Jubilee year will offer a number of initiatives to help us grow in the merciful heart of Christ:

a) The Holy Door in St Peter's Basilica will be opened as the Door of Mercy for all pilgrims to enter. Every Basilica and cathedral, as well as churches and shrines of special significance will also have a Holy Door opened so that pilgrims can pass through, and open themselves to this wonderful gift of mercy.

b) The sacrament of Reconciliation will be made available more



The Holy Door - St Peters Basilica

The Year of Mercy is a wonderful God-given opportunity for each one of us to go deeper in our conversion to Jesus, allowing ourselves to be touched more profoundly by his merciful love, and letting him change us into his likeness. May we become even more convinced that "his mercy endures forever", and that the only hope for the world is the mercy of Christ. May we be moved to forgive those who have offended us, to repent of harsh judgements against others, and to discover afresh the richness of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. May we open our hearts in a new way to the poor, and do more works of mercy, visiting the sick, feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, and bringing healing love to those most neglected, rejected, and abandoned. From the grace of the Holy Year I trust that the face of the Church before our contemporary world will shine more truly with loving mercy, and many will find their way back to the true home where they belong, feeling welcome within the community of disciples and embraced by the merciful arms of our Father God. ■

Fr Ken Barker MGL is the founder and Moderator of the Missionaries of God's Love (MGL), a new emerging congregation in the Australian Church. He is involved in many works of evangelization and spiritual renewal, and is the author of popular books, including 'Becoming Fire', 'Young Men Rise up', 'His Name is Mercy', and 'Amazing Love'.



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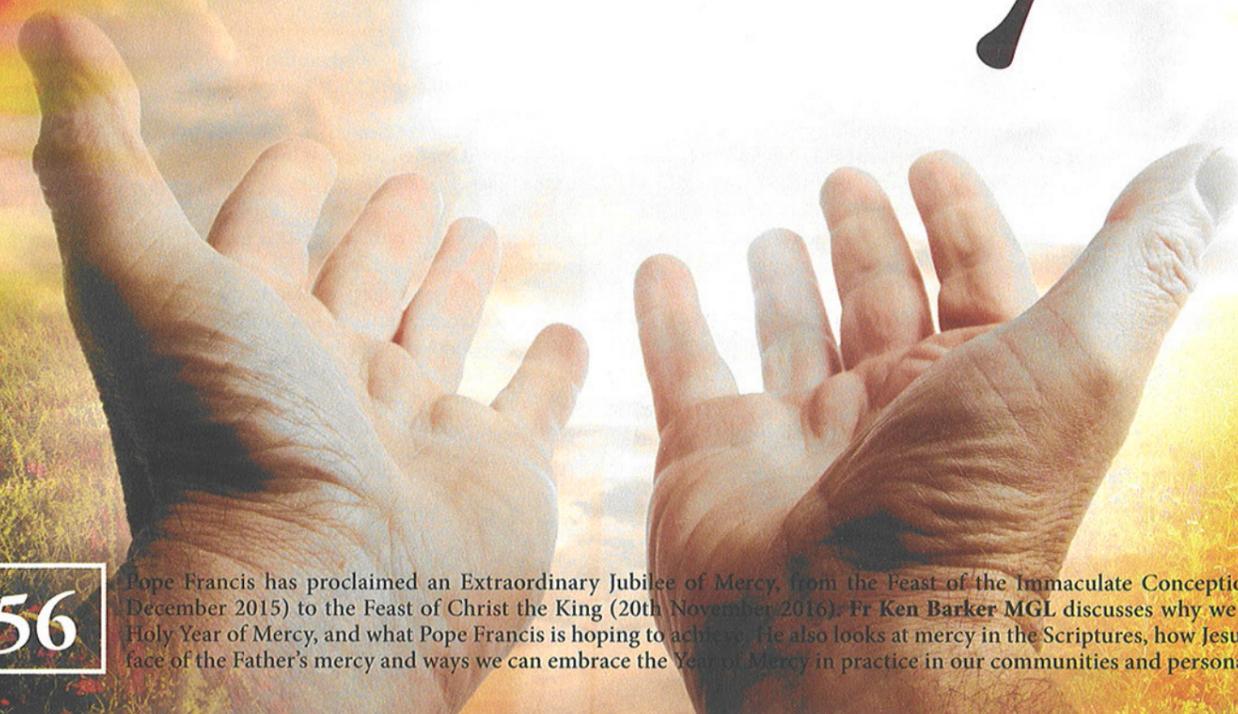
INFORM

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"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."

Pope Francis - Homily on Divine Mercy Sunday, April 7, 2013

Embracing The Year of Mercy



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Pope Francis has proclaimed an Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, from the Feast of the Immaculate Conception (8th December 2015) to the Feast of Christ the King (20th November 2016). Fr Ken Barker MGL discusses why we need a Holy Year of Mercy, and what Pope Francis is hoping to achieve. He also looks at mercy in the Scriptures, how Jesus is the face of the Father's mercy and ways we can embrace the Year of Mercy in practice in our communities and personal lives.

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ope Francis has proclaimed an Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, beginning on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception (8th December 2015) and ending on the Solemnity of Christ the King (20th November 2016). What a magnificent prophetic gesture! He wants the whole Church to gaze upon the face of Jesus and discover again the merciful heart of our Father God. He wants us to be so deeply touched by the mercy of Christ that we experience a profound change of heart. Then from this conversion we will be able "to go out to every man and woman, bringing the goodness and tenderness of God!"

The Pope is convinced that the Church's witness of life, preaching, and pastoral activity should all be caught up in the tender heart of our God. Mercy is the highest quality in the heart of God. Therefore it is the most important quality that we as Church need to witness to the world. Our very credibility in the eyes of the alienated and the unbeliever depends on how we show mercy and compassion. The Pope is concerned that in our struggle against the evident evils in our contemporary culture we can seem to be sounding a strident voice of condemnation. Maybe we are not sufficiently in touch with the brokenness and suffering in the lives of those we chastise. Our eyes are to be fixed on the mercy of Jesus in the gospels; the way he met with sinners, the poor, the marginalized, the sick and the suffering.

MERCY IS THE HIGHEST QUALITY IN THE HEART OF GOD.

Pope Francis has more than once disclosed how his own heart had been first opened profoundly to the gift of mercy. As a 17-year old, on the feast of St Matthew, he had been to the sacrament of Reconciliation and felt a profound touch of God's mercy. His experience was like that of Matthew, who was a godless tax-collector, and a public sinner, but was unexpectedly caught by the merciful gaze of Jesus upon him, and felt the call to follow. As a result of this encounter with Mercy the young teenager, destined to become pontiff, decided to enter the Jesuits. Later when he was made bishop the Pope recalled this life-changing experience. He chose as his episcopal motto the words from the commentary of St Bede on this gospel passage: miserando atque eligendo (looking upon him with mercy, he chose him). When he was elected Pope he made it his papal motto.

We all need to experience the gift of mercy flowing from the heart of Christ broken open for us on the cross. In Scripture there are two main words for mercy. The first is *hesed*, which means that God does not count our faults against us. As the Psalmist says so beautifully, "If you O Lord should mark our guilt, who would survive? But with you is found forgiveness. For this we revere you" (Ps 130:3-4).

The second word is *rehamim*. It is related to *rehem*, the womb of a mother. It evokes the feeling of a mother cherishing and not forgetting the child in her womb (cf. Ls 49:15). St Therese of Lisieux had an image for this. A small child who has displeased his mother may sulk in a corner and scream in fear of punishment. If he does this he will be left there in his misery. But if he comes to her with outstretched arms, smiling and saying, "Kiss me, Mama, I won't do it again", surely the

mother would press him tenderly to her heart, forgetting what he has done. That is the hug of God's mercy, the *rehamim*.

Both of these aspects of God's mercy are depicted poignantly in Jesus' finest parable of mercy, the parable of the prodigal son, or more appropriately the parable of the forgiving father. It is about what the Father is like. When the father sees the boy returning in the distance he runs to him and throws his arms around him and kisses him tenderly. That is the *rehamim*. He lavishes his affection on his repentant son. And there are no questions. "What happened to the money?" "How many women did you have?" "Why did you do this to me?" There was no interrogation at all. No dressing down. This is the *hesed* of God. There is no counting of faults against the sinner. Simply heartfelt welcome and restoration to sonship.

If are open to receive mercy we will become merciful like the Father. Pope Francis is hoping that this year of focus on mercy will help us to become less judgemental of others. Jesus said, "Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned" (Lk 6:37). This was the problem of the Pharisees in the gospels. It is worth noting that the parable of the forgiving father was told for the sake of the Pharisees who were critical about Jesus dining with public sinners. In the parable the older son refused to join the celebration and shut himself out from the Father's house, locked within his own self-righteousness. He represents the Pharisees. He has been the dutiful one, law-abiding and respected, admired and praised for his virtue, but he lacks the quality of mercy. He condemns his brother for his faults and cannot rejoice on his return. He is the symbol of good religious people who have not discovered the Father's heart of mercy. They are so intent on their own performance in the house of God that they have become proud and self-sufficient. They need to discover their weakness and nothingness before God, and hence their utter need for his mercy.

In this vein it is good to recall the sequel to the gospel account of the call of Matthew. Apparently Matthew decided to put on a party for all his tax-collector friends and various public sinners in the town, his old friends and associates, with Jesus in their midst. The Pharisees were scandalized. Jesus' response is important to note, "It is not the healthy who need the doctor, but the sick. Go and learn the meaning of the words: What I want is mercy, not sacrifice. I did not come to call the virtuous, but sinners" (Mt 9:10-11). The Pharisees were religious people, but their very religious practice had shut them out from the merciful gaze of God. ➤



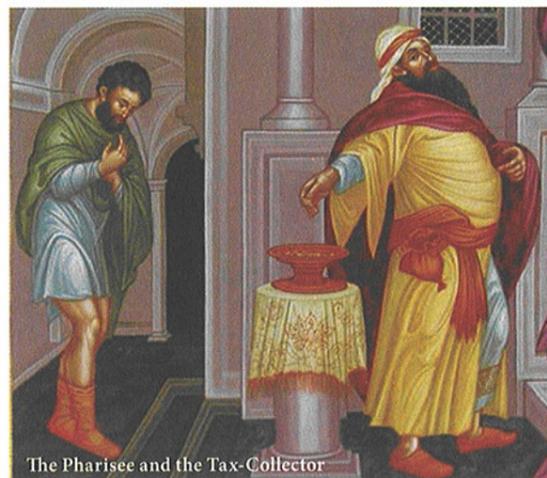
IT IS ONLY BY GRACE THAT WE CAN CLAIM TO HAVE ANYTHING THAT CAN AID OUR SALVATION OR SANCTIFICATION.

They had a sense of moral superiority, looking down on others who did not seem to have it together very well. But those who truly know God and know themselves recognize humbly that any virtue they have is due to the mercy of God. It is only by grace that we can claim to have anything that can aid our salvation or sanctification. As Paul says, "But God loved us with so much love that he was rich in mercy; when we were dead through our sins, he brought us to life with Christ.....it is by grace that you have been saved, through faith; not by anything of your own, but by a gift from God" (Eph 2:4,8). No one can take the moral high ground and judge others; we are all simply to be found together at the foot of the cross of Jesus receiving his precious blood which washes away our sins.

Jesus told another parable for those who trust in their own virtue, and have a sense of superiority in their hearts towards others (Lk 18:9-14). Two men went up to the Temple to pray. The first, a Pharisee, stood before God and prayed, "God I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector." Then he listed his "sacrifices" - fasting twice a week, tithing. The tax-collector, standing down the back, not even able to lift his eyes to heaven, but just beating his breast, cried, "God be merciful to me a sinner" That prayer pierced the heart of the Lord. The other did not. Why? The tax-collector's prayer was honest. Unlike the Pharisee up at the front he had no spiritual achievements, no spiritual status, no claims on holiness. Yet his position was one of truth. There is no pretence, no cover-up, no denial, no social mask; simply the raw reality of his weak, wounded and shabby condition before God. This is the only way to be authentic before God. The problem

with the Pharisees was that they did not allow the Spirit to show them their true state before God. The truth is that whether we have ecclesiastical honours, notched up theology degrees, or made significant progress in the spiritual life, we are all very needy and broken human beings. We are totally dependent upon the mercy of God for our redemption and sanctification.

The year of Mercy will hopefully be a grace-filled time for forgiveness and reconciliation. The Pope is aware that in a litigious age the cry for justice can drown out the plea for mercy. Mere justice is not enough. Mercy is not opposed to justice, but it is God's way of reaching out to sinners, offering a new chance to come to one's senses, repent, and believe. Justice brings us what we deserve; mercy gives us the grace of forgiveness which we do not deserve. Mercy does not mean that we condone or excuse wrong doing. Yet we are still ready to forgive offences done against us. To forgive another is to let go of any resentment or bitterness, no longer to hold up a fist in our heart against the offender, but to relinquish one's judgment upon the other.



The Pharisee and the Tax-Collector

MERCY DOES NOT MEAN THAT WE CONDONE OR EXCUSE WRONG DOING.

WE ALL NEED TO EXPERIENCE THE GIFT OF MERCY FLOWING FROM THE HEART OF CHRIST BROKEN OPEN FOR US ON THE CROSS.

Rather we give them over to the judgment of the Lord.

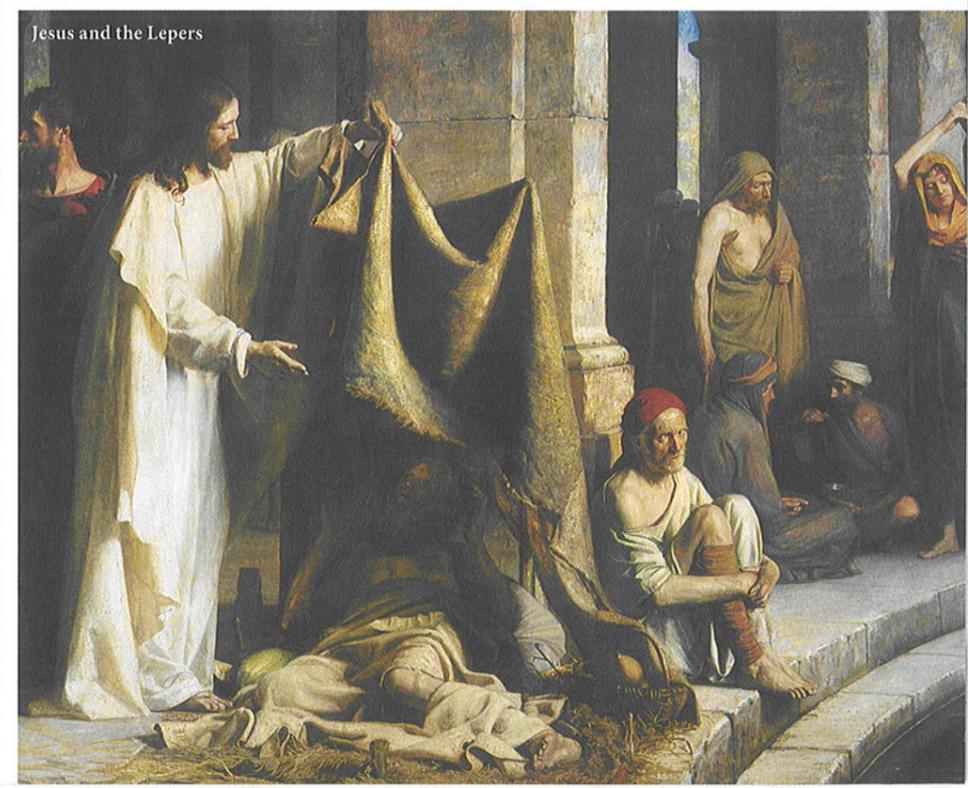
The cross of Jesus speaks of the lavish mercy of God. When the human race had no way out of its morass of anger, hatred and revenge, God became one of us, so that we could be redeemed. As he was being nailed to the cross he did not rise up and smite the soldiers who were inflicting totally unjust and physically horrendous pain upon him. Instead at that moment he cried out "Father forgive them for they know not what they do". This heart of forgiveness has breathed life into the world, giving us new hope that we are not doomed to an eternal cycle of hatred and violence. Jesus went into the depth of our human pain. Being one with us in our brokenness he turned hatred into love, evil into goodness, slavery into freedom. He turned what was the worst form of human condemnation and execution into a permanent sign of the enduring merciful love of God.

UNLIKE THE PHARISEE UP AT THE FRONT HE HAD NO SPIRITUAL ACHIEVEMENTS, NO SPIRITUAL STATUS, NO CLAIMS ON HOLINESS. YET HIS POSITION WAS ONE OF TRUTH.

Pope Francis hopes that we will look again at Jesus in the gospels and see how all of his actions in his public ministry are an expression of God's mercy. The gospels are full of cries for mercy from people who are deaf and dumb, blind, crippled and afflicted with leprosy. The crowds

are constantly pressing in towards Jesus for healing. His heart goes out to them: "When he saw the crowds he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd" (Mt 9:36). The Greek word used here for "had compassion" means more like his "guts were wrenched", or even more colourfully, he "was moved in his bowels". The bowels in Hebrew thinking was what we might call "the heart" of the person, the inmost centre of tender affections, kindness and pity. But this heart of mercy was not just a feeling; it compelled the person to action. Mercy is the concrete, down to earth expression of love. We see Jesus with this heart-wrenching compassion when he sees the crowd on the side of the sea of Galilee (Mt 14:14), when the leper came and begged to be cleansed (Mk 1:41), when he was touched by the tears of the widow of Nain and raised her son from the dead (Lk 7:13). Each time Jesus is moved deeply in the depths of his being. His heart aches for the other, and this compels him to action. ➤

JESUS WENT INTO THE DEPTH OF OUR HUMAN PAIN.



Jesus and the Lepers

The Good Samaritan

