



Easter 2016.

What about the risk of “contamination,” the risk of letting oneself be contaminated?

We need to enter the darkness, the night in which so many of our brothers live. We need to be able to make contact with them and let them feel our closeness, without letting ourselves be wrapped up in that darkness and influenced by it. Caring for outcasts and sinners does not mean letting the wolves attack the flock. It means trying to reach everyone by sharing the experience of mercy, which we ourselves have experienced, without ever caving in to the temptation of feeling that we are just or perfect.

VII. SINNERS YES, CORRUPT NO

What relationship is there between mercy and justice?

Mercy is an element that is important, even indispensable, for human relationships, so that brotherhood may exist. Justice on its own is not enough. With mercy and forgiveness, God goes beyond justice, he subsumes it and exceeds it in a higher event in which we experience love, which is at the root of true justice.

What is the difference between sin and corruption?

Corruption is the sin which, rather than being recognized as such and making us humble, is elevated to a system, it becomes a mental habit, a way of living. We no longer feel the need for forgiveness and mercy, but we justify ourselves and our behaviors. The repentant sinner, who sins again and again because of his weakness, will find forgiveness if he acknowledges his need for mercy. The corrupt man is the one who sins but does not repent, who sins and pretends to be Christian, and it is this double life that is scandalous.

We need to pray that God can find his way into the hearts of the corrupt and grant them the grace of shame, the grace to recognize themselves as sinners in need of his forgiveness.

Why does God never tire of forgiving us?

Because he is God, because he is mercy, and because mercy is the first attribute of God. The name of God is mercy.

There are no situations we cannot get out of. Jesus is there, his hand extended, ready to reach out to us and pull us out of the mud, out of sin, out of the abyss of evil into which we have fallen. We need only be conscious of our state, be honest with ourselves, and not lick our wounds.

How can mercy be taught to children?

By getting them used to the stories of the Gospel and to the parables. By talking with them, and above all by having them experience mercy. By helping them understand that in life we sometimes make mistakes and fall but that the important thing is to always get back up. It is the first school of mercy, because it is there that we have been loved and learned to love, have been forgiven and learned to forgive.

VIII. MERCY AND COMPASSION

What are some similarities and differences between mercy and compassion?

Mercy is divine and has to do with the judgement of sin. Compassion has a more human face. It means to suffer with, to suffer together, to not remain indifferent to the pain and suffering of others. Jesus was moved by the tears of the widow, who was devastated by the loss of her only son. He says to her, “Woman, do not weep.” Jesus does not look at reality from the outside, without letting himself be moved, as if he were taking a picture. He lets himself get involved.

IX. LIVING THE HOLY YEAR OF MERCY

What are the most important things that a believer should do during the Holy Year of Mercy?

He should open up to the Mercy of God, open up his heart and himself, and allow Jesus to come toward him by approaching the confessional with faith. And he should try and be merciful with others.

Are the famous Works of Mercy of the Christian tradition still valid for the third millennium, or do they need to be reevaluated?

They are still valid, still current.

We have received freely, we give freely. We are called to serve Christ the Crucified through every marginalized person. We touch the flesh of Christ in he who is outcast, hungry, thirsty, naked, imprisoned, ill, unemployed, persecuted, in search of refuge. That is where we find our God, that is where we touch the Lord. Jesus himself told us, explaining the protocol for which we will be judged: “Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did it for me”. ■

‘This is an edited extract from The Name of God Is Mercy by Pope Francis and Andrea Tornielli, published by Macmillan Australia and available now’.

POPE FRANCIS
THE NAME OF GOD IS MERCY

Purchase this book at THE MUSTARD SEED BOOKSHOP

Ph 02 9646 9000
Store 3 Keating Street, Lidcombe 2141
www.mustardseed.org.au



INFORM

Informative
Intelligent
Inspirational

THE NAME OF GOD IS MERCY

161

Pope Francis invites all humanity to an intimate and personal dialogue on the subject closest to his heart – mercy – which has long been the cornerstone of his faith and is now the central teaching of his papacy. In this conversation with Vatican reporter Andrea Tornielli, Pope Francis explains – through memories from his youth and moving anecdotes from his experiences as a pastor – why “mercy is the first attribute of God.”



Postal Locked Bag 888 Silverwater DC NSW 1811 Street 3 Keating St Lidcombe 2141
Email info@caec.com.au Phone (02) 9646 9010 Fax (02) 9646 9090 Web www.caec.com.au
INFORM - 50c per copy. Single subscription \$12 per year within Australia, 6 issues annually. Single copy of every back issue of INFORM still in print - \$40 per set. Contact us on the details above for orders and details.
Published with ecclesiastical approval / © 2016 / Photocopying Prohibited.

A

TIME FOR MERCY

Where did the inspiration for the Year of Mercy come from?

I can say that the centrality of mercy, which for me is Jesus' most important message, has slowly evolved over the years in my work as a priest, as a consequence of my experience as a confessor, and thanks to the many positive and beautiful stories that I have known.

I believe that this is a time for mercy. The Church is showing her maternal side, her motherly face, to a humanity that is wounded. She does not wait for the wounded to knock on her doors, she looks for them on the streets, she gathers them in, she embraces them, she takes care of them, she makes them feel loved.

Saint John Paul II affirmed that the Church lives an authentic life when it professes and proclaims mercy, the most amazing attribute of the Creator and Redeemer, and when it leads humanity to the font of mercy.

Pope Benedict XVI wrote "Mercy is in reality the core of the Gospel message. Everything that the Church says and does shows that God has mercy for man".

What is mercy for you?

Etymologically, "mercy" derives from *misericordis*, which means opening one's heart to wretchedness. Mercy is the divine attitude which embraces, it is God's giving himself to us, accepting us, and vowing to forgive.

For me this is one of the most important revelations: you will continue to be the chosen people and all your sins will be forgiven. So mercy is deeply connected to God's faithfulness. The Lord is faithful because he cannot deny himself. This is explained well by St Paul: "If we are unfaithful, he remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself." You can deny God, you can sin against him, but God cannot deny himself. He remains faithful.

Why, in your opinion, is humanity so in need of mercy?

Because humanity is wounded, deeply wounded. Either it does not know how to cure its wounds or it believes that it's not possible to cure them.

Pius XII, more than half a century ago, said that the tragedy of our age was that it had lost its sense of sin, the awareness of sin. Today we add further to the tragedy by considering our illness, our sins, to be incurable, things that cannot be healed or forgiven. We need mercy. We need to ask ourselves why today so many people go to psychics and fortune-tellers. GK Chesterton said "When Man ceases to worship God he does not worship nothing but worships everything."

Mostly, people are looking for someone to listen to them. Someone willing to grant them time, to listen to their dramas and difficulties. This is what I call the "apostolate of the ear." I feel compelled to say to confessors: talk, listen with patience, and above all tell people that God loves them. And if the confessor cannot absolve a person, he needs to explain why, he needs to give them a blessing, even without the holy sacrament. Be tender with these people. Do not push them away. People are suffering.

II. THE GIFT OF CONFESSION

Why is it important to go to Confession?

Jesus said to his apostles: "Whose sins you forgive are forgiven". Therefore, the apostles and all their successors become instruments of the mercy of God. They act in *persona Christi*. If you are not capable of talking to your brother about your mistakes, you can be sure that you can't talk about them with God, either, and therefore you end up confessing into the mirror, to yourself. We are social beings, and forgiveness has a social implication; my sin wounds mankind, my brothers and sisters, and society as a whole. Confessing to a priest is a way of putting my life into the hands and heart of someone else, someone who in that moment acts in the name of Jesus. It's a way to be real and authentic: we face the facts by looking at another person and not in the mirror. It is true that I can talk to the Lord and ask him for forgiveness, implore him. And the Lord will forgive me immediately. But it is important to go to confession, that I sit in front of a priest who embodies Jesus, that I kneel before Mother Church, called to dispense the mercy of Christ. There is objectivity in this gesture of genuflection before the priest; it becomes the vehicle through which grace reaches and heals me. It is an encounter with mercy.

III. LOOKING FOR THE SMALLEST OPENING

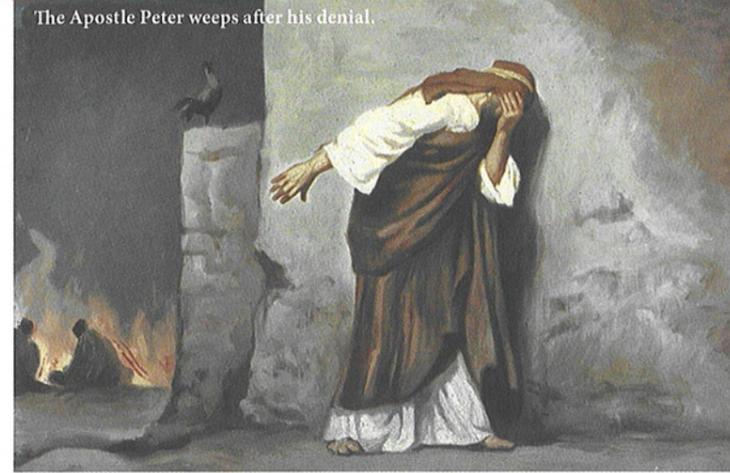
What do you need in order to obtain mercy? Is it necessary to have a certain predisposition?

The first thing that comes to mind is the phrase "I can't take it anymore!" You reach a point when you need to be understood, to be healed, to be made whole, forgiven. You need to get up again, to be able to resume your path. The Church Fathers teach us that a shattered heart is the most pleasing gift to God. It is the sign that we are conscious of our sins, of the evil we have done, of our wretchedness, and of our need for forgiveness and mercy.

God does not want anyone to be lost. His mercy is infinitely greater than our sins, his medicine is infinitely stronger than our illnesses that he has to heal. I have always said that the Lord precedes us, he anticipates us. God waits; he waits for us to concede him only the smallest glimmer of space so that he can enact his forgiveness and his charity within us. We stand before a God who knows our sins, our betrayals, our denials, our wretchedness. And yet he is there waiting for us, ready to give himself completely to us, to lift us up. ➤

"Mercy is the divine attitude which embraces, it is God's giving himself to us, accepting us, and vowing to forgive".

The Apostle Peter weeps after his denial.



IV. A SINNER, LIKE SIMON PETER

You have often described yourself as a sinner. It's truly striking to hear a Pope say these things about himself.

Really? I don't think it's so unusual, even in the lives of my predecessors. For example, Paul VI said, "For me it has always been a great mystery of God to be in wretchedness and to be in the presence of the mercy of God. I am nothing, I am wretched." I have to say that when I speak of this, I always think of what Simon Peter told Jesus on the Sunday of his resurrection, when he met him on his own. What might Peter have said to the Messiah? Might he have said that he felt like a sinner? He must have thought of his betrayal, of what had happened a few days earlier when he pretended for three times not to recognize Jesus. If Peter did all of that, and if despite all this, Jesus said, "Tend my sheep", I don't think we should be surprised if his successors describe themselves as sinners. It is nothing new. The Pope is a man who needs the mercy of God.

Why are we sinners?

Because of original sin. It's something we know from experience. Our humanity is wounded; we know how to distinguish between good and evil, we know what is evil, we try to follow the path of goodness, but we often fall because of our weaknesses and choose evil.

V. TOO MUCH MERCY?

How do you approach the problem of the older son in the parable of the Prodigal Son? Sometimes, even from the Church, we hear; "Too much mercy! The Church must condemn sin."

The Church condemns sin because it has to relay the truth: "This is a sin." But at the same time, it embraces the sinner who recognizes himself as such, it welcomes him, it speaks to him of the infinite mercy of God. We must go back to the Gospel. We find that it speaks not only of welcoming and forgiveness but also of the "feast" for the returning son. The expression of mercy is the joy of the feast, "I tell you, in just the same way there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need of repentance" (Luke 15:7). God is a careful and attentive father, ready to welcome any person

who takes a step or even expresses the desire to take a step that leads home. He is there, staring out at the horizon, expecting us, waiting for us. The Church does not exist to condemn people but to bring about an encounter with the visceral love of God's mercy.

VI. SHEPHERDS, NOT SCHOLARS OF THE LAW

Can there be mercy without acknowledgement of one's sins?

Mercy exists, but if you don't want to receive it... If you don't recognize yourself as a sinner, it means you don't want to receive it, it means you don't feel the need for it. Sometimes you might feel skeptical and think it is impossible to get back on your feet again. Or maybe you prefer your wounds, the wounds of sin, and you behave like a dog, licking your wounds with your tongue. This is a narcissistic illness that makes people bitter. There is pleasure in feeling bitter, an unhealthy pleasure.

If we do not begin by examining our wretchedness, if we stay lost and despair that we will never be forgiven, we end up licking our wounds, and they stay open and never heal. Instead, there is medicine, there is healing.

What do you think of people who always confess the same sins?

It is different when someone relapses and commits the same sin and suffers because of it, when they have a hard time getting back on their feet. The most important thing in the life of every man and every woman is not they should never fall along the way. The important thing is always to get back up, not to stay on the ground licking your wounds. The Lord of mercy always forgives me; he always offers me the possibility of starting over.

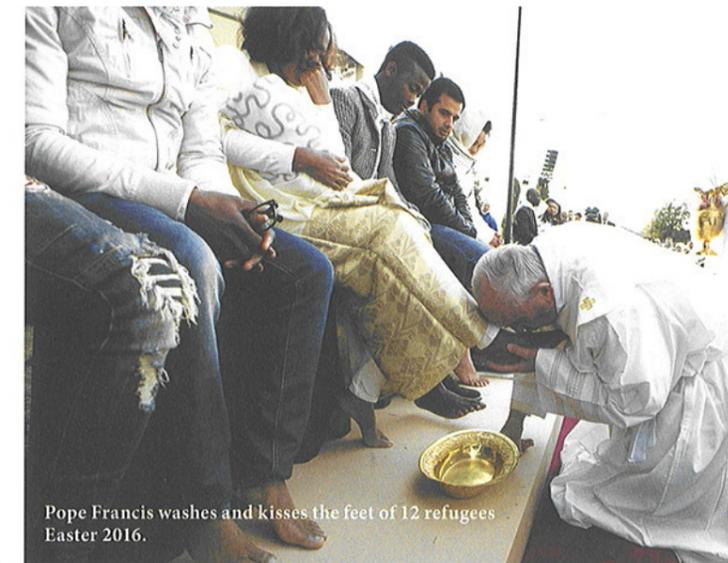
Can there be opposition between truth and mercy, or between doctrine and mercy?

Mercy is real. Mercy is doctrine. Mercy is true.

We know that Jesus says that we should forgive seventy times seven: the important thing is to return frequently to the source of mercy and grace. ➤



Pope Francis goes to confession.



Pope Francis washes and kisses the feet of 12 refugees Easter 2016.