



Apostles for Today

Prayer and Reflection - March 2016

Easter 2016 - The mercy of God in the mystery of the death and resurrection of Christ

During the opening of the extraordinary Holy Year of Mercy, Pope Francis reminded us that this year is “*a gift of grace*”. He invites us “*to rediscover the infinite mercy of the Father who welcomes everyone and goes out personally to encounter each of them*” (Homily of 12/8/2015). This invitation resonates strongly in our hearts. As members and collaborators of the Union of Catholic Apostolate, we are called to make that invitation our own, like our Founder Saint Vincent Pallotti who recognized himself to be a prodigy of mercy and wanted the infinite love and Mercy of God to be the hallmarks of the members and collaborators of the Union.

The mercy of God was fully revealed to us in the person of Christ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in human form. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death— even death on a cross! (Ph 2:6-8).

This is this mystery of the merciful love of God that we proclaim with conviction in our Creed: “*I believe [...] in Jesus Christ, his only Son [...who] was crucified, died, [...] rose again from the dead, [...] ascended into heaven [to give us life]*”; it is the foundation of our faith. God, who with one word could save thousands of worlds, as Saint Faustina said, wanted our redemption to be through the cross of His Son Jesus Christ and he, Jesus Christ, in his infinite love and mercy agreed to assume the entire fate of the human condition; a fate marked by suffering and death, in order to save us from evil, sin and death. By accepting suffering and death on the cross, Christ revealed the unfathomable love of God for every person, his passion being the culmination of his work of salvation. The passion of Christ is a sign of the unlimited and merciful love of God, the most striking gesture of his love and mercy.

In his passion, the Lord Jesus has given us an unparalleled love that surpasses all human understanding. All forms of physical trial were for Jesus

the source of unspeakable pain reaching the limits of human endurance. From the agony up to the total gift of his life, Christ demonstrated a merciful heart, every gesture revealing that mercy; he takes upon himself human misery and suffering. Jesus takes upon himself all that separates us from God. He joined himself to all our loneliness, our situations of anguish, our betrayals.

When the day to extend his arms came, he did not want to leave us on our own, without a remembrance; in his mercy, he instituted the Holy Eucharist as a sign of his presence among us so full of love and mercy. St. Faustina said to this effect: “*On leaving the earth, O Lord, You wanted to stay with us, and so You left us Yourself in the Sacrament of the Altar, and You opened wide Your mercy to us. [...] In the Blessed Sacrament, You left us Your mercy; your love deigned to arrange it so, that, going through life, suffering and toil, I might never doubt of Your goodness and mercy*” (Diary 1747-8).

St. Vincent Pallotti him says in God infinite Love: “*Enlightened by faith I recall that Our Lord Jesus Christ showed us his infinite love and mercy, during his holy life, by speaking and working for our eternal salvation. But, before He went to Calvary to die for us on the Cross, He deigned to institute the Holy Eucharist [...] as an unbloody Sacrifice and as a sacrament for the nourishment of our souls [...] for] the perpetual renewal of the Sacrifice of the Cross on our altars*” (GIL, p. 119; OOC XIII, pp. 166-7).

It was during this meal that Christ gave us the sublime example that our love and mercy should be shown in our service towards our brothers and sisters (Jn 13:14). Pope Francis, in his Bull of Indiction for the Jubilee Year, says that: “*While he was instituting the Eucharist as an everlasting memorial of himself and his paschal sacrifice, he symbolically placed this supreme act of revelation in the light of his mercy. Within the very same context of mercy, Jesus entered upon his passion and death, conscious of the great mystery of love that he would consummate on the Cross*” (MV 7).

At the time of the agony he experienced a sadness so terrible as to declare: “My soul is sorrowful even unto death” (Mt 26:38). Although his sadness was caused by human sin, still he approached his suffering with the salvation of all humankind at heart.

On the cross, he continued to show his mercy, forgiving the sins of the wrongdoer who repented (Lk 23:42-43), putting his life in the hands of the Father for the salvation of human beings (Lk 23:46) and accepting to die in the terrible agony of the Passion, suspended on the wood of the cross. And all this for love of me! Pope John Paul II, in *Dives in Misericordiae* said, “*In this way the cross of Christ, on which the Son, consubstantial with the Father, renders*

full justice to God, is also a radical revelation of mercy, or rather of the love that goes against what constitutes the very root of evil in the history of man: against sin and death”.

After his death, he opened the inexhaustible source of mercy for us; He gave us what was most dear to him: the blood and water from his side, the source of all mercy. St. Faustina wrote in the Diary *“In Your inconceivable love, You allowed Your most holy side to be opened, and streams of Blood and Water gushed forth from Your Heart. Here is the living fountain of Your mercy”* (Diary 1748).

In this way, Christ completely fulfilled the will of God, having the redemption and salvation of humankind at heart. Through his obedience, Christ was received the mercy of the Father, a love more powerful than death, when God the Father raised him from the dead. As we read in the Acts of the Apostles: “God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you, you crucified” (Acts 2:36). In his resurrection Christ shows us the fullness of the always compassionate love of God which addresses all human misery; it is undoubtedly a sign and instrument of divine mercy, the crowning of this mercy and of the entire saving mission. In Jesus, evil is defeated by good, hatred by love, death by the resurrection.

Indeed, Christ, whom “the Father did not spare” for the sake of human beings, and who, in his passion and death on the cross, was not the object of human mercy, revealed in his resurrection the fullness of the love the Father nurtures towards him and, through him, to all people. “He is not God of the dead but of the living” (Mk 12:27). In his resurrection Christ has revealed the God of merciful love, precisely because he has accepted the cross as the way to the resurrection. And that is why, when we remember the cross of Christ, his passion and death, our faith and hope are based on the Risen One.

So mercy is the way that unites God and humans, so that we may open our hearts to the hope of being loved forever despite the limitations of our sin; everything in Him speaks of mercy. The merciful love of every Christian, and especially of every member and collaborator of the Union of Catholic Apostolate must be on the same wavelength. As the Father loves, so the children love. As he is merciful, so are we called to be merciful towards each other.

To be capable of mercy, we must first apply ourselves to listening to the Word of God. This means that we must rediscover the value of silence in order to meditate on the Word addressed to us. It is in this way that it becomes possible to contemplate the mercy of God and make it our lifestyle.

In the words of Pope Francis in the Urbi et Orbi Message of Easter 2013, “*let us accept the grace of Christ’s Resurrection! 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*”.

For our reflection:

- During the Jubilee, Pope Francis wants all Christian people to reflect on the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, as our response to the merciful love of the Father. It will, he said, “*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*” (MV 15).
1. Let us recall these corporal works of mercy: feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, sheltering the homeless, visiting the sick, visiting prisoners, burying the dead. And the spiritual works of mercy: counselling the doubtful, instructing the ignorant, admonishing sinners, comforting the afflicted, forgiving offenses, bearing wrongs patiently, praying for the living and the dead.
 2. What exactly are we proposing to our communities, our families, our LCCs or NCCs during this year of mercy?

Let us pray with our Founder, St. Vincent Pallotti:

“*My God, [...] you who are infinite love, infinite mercy, forgive me if I dare, as a mode of expression, to say that you are Crazy with Love and Mercy towards me since, at every moment, and from all eternity, you think of me and pour out on me infinite floods of graces, favours, gifts and mercies, of all of your infinite divine attributes which are all infinitely merciful, and always Father, Son and Holy Spirit, you feed me with me with all of your being, your essence, your properties, your divine actions and all of your infinite attributes*”. Amen (OCCC X, pp. 235-6).

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