



Apostles for Today

Prayer and Reflection - December 2015

The Incarnation of Mercy

We are all waiting in joyful anticipation for the opening of the Holy Door, or rejoicing deeply that it has already taken place, in order to allow ourselves to be drawn by the fascination of the “*Misericordiae Vultus*”, the face of mercy, of a God whom we will never cease discovering. Of you my heart has spoken: Seek his face. Your face, O Lord, I seek. Hide not your face from me (Ps 26:8-9).

In this way we pray with the psalmist, in this way we pray with the Church. Pope Francis speaks to us as follows: “Jesus Christ is the face of the Father’s mercy”, he is the face who allows us to identify the person of God himself in whom we believe, with complete generosity of heart. The mercy of the Father shines brightly on the face of Jesus Our Lord.

Throughout the course of this holy Year, it will be the Spirit of the Living God who will guide and lead us to the contemplation of this face of mercy, this human face which, in the Incarnation, the Holy Spirit formed in the womb of Mary.

In temptation and in the fall, Adam did not trust his Creator.

In the Incarnation, Mary surrenders herself unconditionally: “Here I am”, and gives her full, complete and irrevocable assent to the Father’s plan.

Growing in her womb was the fairest of the children of men, on whose lips are spread grace and mercy, pure and free because offered to those who do not deserve it.

In the Incarnation, the promise of the Protoevangelium restores our trust in our Creator God: “her seed shall bruise your head” (cf. Gn 3, 15). The Son of God crushes the head of the enemy who had struck him - and who continues to strike human hearts with doubt, distrust and lack of confidence in their God.

The Incarnation, for whose celebration we are preparing ourselves during this Advent, is the Incarnation of Mercy, which “is from generation to generation” (Lc 1:50), the Mercy of God which still wants to propose itself to the free choice of each one of us, who so often fall prey to discouragement, to dismay, to guilt feelings, to the temptation to selfishness, to closed-mindedness and to despondency, as if the enemy still had the last word in our lives.

Rejoice Mary, you have found favour in the sight of God. The promise becomes good news: this offspring will crush the head of the enemy, who insidiously continues to say to us: How can God love you, who are so unworthy, so fragile, so inconsistent?

The Incarnation of the Son of God is mercy given freely, which gives me again the certainty that God loves me personally, he loves me precisely because I don't deserve to be loved. Mercy becomes flesh precisely for me, a sinner; a sinner, but not corrupt, because I recognise my need of mercy! (Pope Francis)

To use the words of St. Vincent: Oh how good God is with me who am unworthy of every good, and deserving of every evil! (cf. OCCC X, 182)

Mercy becomes flesh in Jesus and comes to seek me, to find me; comes to my house to bring salvation, comes to dwell with me.

The angel also says to me: “Do not be afraid, behold I bring you news of great joy, which is for all the people: Today a Saviour is born, who is Christ the Lord (Lk 2:10-11).

Mercy become flesh is the only source of joy for us human beings of every time, language, people and nation.

If mercy comes to dwell with us, we can no longer walk around sad, with our heads bowed down. If mercy has become flesh it is so that we may no longer be closed in upon ourselves in our selfishness, in the narrow walls of our felling good being alone.

“In this Holy Year - Pope Francis reminds us - the sweetness of the countenance of the Mother of Mercy watches over us, so that all of us may rediscover the joy of God’s tenderness. Mary attests that the mercy of the Son of God knows no bounds and extends to everyone, without exception” (cf. *Misericordiae Vultus* 24).

Under the gaze of Mary we contemplate the mystery, our hearts filled with gratitude, and say to her, as Saint Vincent taught us: You are our Teacher, Mother and Advocate: as Teacher you invite us to come to you every day to hear the inspirations which you give us to comfort us and sustain us in living the Gospel faithfully; as Mother show pity to us in our miseries; as Advocate you are ready to obtain whatever we need to remedy every lack of correspondence to grace. In every necessity we know who to appeal to with trust. You, Daughter of the Eternal Father, will obtain for us spiritual power to overcome all enemies of our soul, who wish to prevent us from believing in his infinite mercy. You, Mother of the Eternal Word made flesh, will obtain for us light to know the tricks that the enemy uses against us. You, Bride of the Holy Spirit, are always ready, or rather, ardently desire and, through your intercession commit yourself to obtain for us, the grace of living a life of love in the infinite Love (cf. OCCC XIII, 191-192).

In this Holy Year of mercy, let us spend much time with Jesus, Mercy made flesh, let us experience his action in our hearts, let

us allow ourselves to be touched by his presence in the very depths of our being: my God, I believe that I would offend your mercy if I dared to think that you who are Infinite Mercy would not be able to triumph over all of my resistance. I would truly offend you, my Infinite mercy, if I dared to doubt. You treat me so mercifully with an abundance of grace even greater than that which you give to those who are upright of heart! (cf. OOCC X, 182). Let us ask the Holy Spirit, who made the Incarnation possible, to make each one of us a channel of mercy, to mould also in us a face of mercy and to communicate to us the same feelings that were in Christ Jesus. Let us share mercy with concrete actions: let us give attention, a listening ear, time, to those who live alongside us.

Let us share our experience that “mercy will always be greater than any sin”, and that” no one can place limits on the love of God who is ever ready to forgive” (MV 3).

With Saint Vincent let us renew our unshakeable trust:

I believe and hold with certainty that your mercy destroys all my misery and fills me with all your gifts above all the angels and all the saints, of all past, present, future and possible creatures, in such a way that if, in Mary, all ages and all generations will admire the miracle of your grace then, in me, who in misery, ungodliness and ingratitude surpass all of the rebellious angels and all of the human race, they will have to admire the miracle of your Mercy (cf. OOCC X, 303). In this year of Mercy, let each one of us live and “tell of” this marvellous experience!

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