

REFLECTIONS ON MERCY:

LECTIO DIVINA FOR THE
JUBILEE YEAR OF MERCY



But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him
(Luke 15:20)

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HOLY READING IN THE JUBILEE YEAR OF MERCY



In his introduction to the Jubilee Year of Mercy, Pope Francis invited the whole Church to reflect on God's Word as a living source of our faith and life:

The season of Lent during this Jubilee Year should also be lived more intensely as a privileged moment to celebrate and experience God's mercy. How many pages of Sacred Scripture are appropriate for meditation during the weeks of Lent to help us rediscover the merciful face of the Father! (*Misericordiae Vultus 17*).

In response to the Holy Father's invitation we offer this *lectio divina* as a prayerful support for your journey towards God this Lent. In Scripture, we discover the merciful face of God, a God who reveals himself to us and reaches out to us wherever we are.

By our holy reading, God's Word becomes ever more deeply implanted in our hearts and this Word can begin to reshape and intensify our faith in God's hope-filled promises of forgiveness, mercy and, indeed, new life. By attending to the Word we are brought into personal encounter with God's mercy and compassion and are freshly awakened to our call to follow him as disciples and to 'go out' together as friends in the Lord on mission.

The readings of Lent are particularly suited for reflection in this Jubilee Year of Mercy, above all the Gospel of Luke which discloses for us many aspects of God's mercy and bids a return and our conversion to Christ. Through our reading we encounter Jesus as the one who finds and gathers all that is lost and divided, who consoles those who suffer and grieve, and who offers forgiveness to all that which stands in need of healing and reconciliation, in ourselves and in our world.

As we enter into our Lenten reflection on familiar texts, including the account of the Transfiguration and the parable of the Prodigal Son, and as we journey towards the Triduum, the great Easter mystery of Jesus' passion, death and resurrection, may we pilgrim with the Lord with a new heart. Through our holy reading, which is a form of prayer, may we allow ourselves to be touched by the loving gaze of the Father who looks upon us with mercy, runs out to meet us on the road in Christ and guides us into new life by his Holy Spirit.

We hope this *lectio divina* nourishes your faith and the spiritual life and vitality of your communities this Lent, opening all to the experience of Christ's love and everlasting embrace.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Daniel Ang". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Daniel Ang

Director, Office for Evangelisation

HOW TO PRAY LECTIO DIVINA

A reading and reflection on the Scriptures which leads to prayer and transformation of life.

Reading – getting to know the text (senses)

The first step is to come to know the text in its entirety. We look at it as a whole, embracing all the elements of it. What is the inspired human author trying to tell us in the text? This reading is the beginning of a process that leads to meditation, prayer and the transformation of life.

- Take in all the elements of the text.
- Be aware of context, related texts, quotes.
- Who are key characters; what are key words?
- Apply all that you know about the text.
- Don't choose any one thing to work with at this stage.

Meditation – engaging with the text, making it your own (reason)

Here we begin to reflect on the text. We approach the text not from its literal meaning, but from a theological point of view. What does it say about the God who speaks to me, and how I am to respond to that God? The text here acts like a mirror; it reveals to us our own faith journey and what we need to do to live it better.

What does the text tell me:

- about the God who speaks?
- about responding to that God?
- about my faith life?
- about what I need to do to transform my faith life?

Prayer – let prayer emerge from your working with the text (will)

Our prayer here arises out of meditation. We are humbled and have become aware of our need for God to help us. We pray for the grace to put into practice our insight into what we need to do to live our faith life more fully.

- Our prayer stems from our reading / meditation.
- Meditation humbles us, so we turn to God in our need.
- We seek the grace we need to do what we must to transform our life.
- We acknowledge that alone we can do nothing.
- "I can do all things in him who strengthens me." (cf. Philippians 4:13)

Action – throughout the day

To help us throughout the day to focus on our particular insight we now choose a word, phrase or sentence. By repeating it during the day we are reminded of what we need to do, and remember that God gives to us the help that we need to do it. The goal of *lectio divina* is transformation of life, so this continuing repetition is like a leaven that brings about the transformation.

- Now choose a word, phrase, sentence.
- Bring it to mind frequently during the day.
- Let it recapture the experience of your *lectio*.
- Use it especially in situations relating to your *lectio insight*.
- "Daily and hourly till the soil of the heart with the Gospel plough." (St John Cassian)

Shared *lectio* involves hearing the word together, sharing one's initial insights into the text, and then, after a private time for meditation, sharing something of those deeper reflections. After a time of prayer, the text chosen for daily reflection may also be shared.

*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, *Urbi et Orbi*

HOW TO USE THIS BOOKLET

This booklet invites you to prayerfully and meditatively reflect on the Sunday readings during Lent and selected readings from Holy Week.

The Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for Lent 2016 has been included in this resource. The message has been divided into 5 parts, and is offered for further reflection during Weeks 1 to 5 of Lent.

This booklet is an instrument that can be used in a variety of ways. Please use it in whatever way suits you best. To find out more about *lectio divina*, and to access this booklet online in PDF format and via mobile devices, please visit www.dbb.org.au

LENT DURING A JUBILEE YEAR OF MERCY

How are you mercy-ing? It is unusual to use the word 'mercy' as a verb, but Pope Francis did just this to capture the idea that mercy is an action – the act of showing mercy to another – and not just something to be dispensed. In fact, it is a way of living. This is the challenge of Lent for each of us in this Jubilee of Mercy, to not simply be a distributor of mercy as something external to who we are, but rather to be 'one who mercies.'

Lent is that graced time of the year where we seek to reconfigure ourselves more closely to Christ. As always, this is not easy as it necessitates change and a 'giving-up.' This Year of Mercy invites us to give up hard-heartedness. It is an invitation to see differently, to look with eyes of mercy. It is a challenge to re-orient ourselves, to look on other people more generously, more kindly, more patiently, more forgivingly.

In the announcement of the Year of Mercy, *Misericordiae Vultus*, Pope Francis implores:

“May the message of mercy reach everyone, and may no one be indifferent to the call to experience mercy.” (MV, 19)

The only way that mercy can reach *everyone* is if we ourselves do our part and become “missionaries of mercy”, people who go out, and out of our way, to be merciful. Pope Francis himself shows us how using simple, practical ways can have a real impact on the lives of people. His simple embrace of a disfigured pilgrim was a small gesture, but a profound sign of acceptance, care and unity.

In early 2015, during a period of wet weather in Rome, Pope Francis organised for 300 umbrellas, which had been left behind by tourists, to be distributed to the homeless. We can all do something like this to those on our own doorstep. This Lent, let's be more conscious of carrying out these small actions of love and make it our way of life.

The Jubilee Year commenced on 8 December 2015, and concludes on 20 November 2016. Pope Francis says,

“In this Jubilee Year, 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.” (MV, 25)

As we engage prayerfully with the Lenten Scriptures during these weeks, we open ourselves up to God's word so that it can guide and transform us. Let's then take this word and let it speak through us to the world. Sometimes, a simple word of love is all it takes.

PRAYER OF POPE FRANCIS FOR THE JUBILEE

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.



A Heart of Mercy

ASH WEDNESDAY

ASH WEDNESDAY

Joel 2:12 - 18

Yet even now, says the LORD, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the LORD, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing. Who knows whether he will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the LORD, your God? Blow the trumpet in Zion; sanctify a fast; call a solemn assembly; gather the people. Sanctify the congregation; assemble the aged; gather the children, even infants at the breast. Let the bridegroom leave his room, and the bride her canopy. Between the vestibule and the altar let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep. Let them say, "Spare your people, O LORD, and do not make your heritage a mockery, a byword among the nations. Why should it be said among the peoples, 'Where is their God?'" Then the LORD became jealous for his land, and had pity on his people.

2 Corinthians 5:20 - 6:2

So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. For he says, "At an acceptable time I have listened to you, and on a day of salvation I have helped you." See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation!

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

"Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven. "So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

"And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you

"And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

REFLECTION - A HEART OF MERCY

Reflection by Pina Bernard

The readings for Ash Wednesday are the same every year, each time we hear from the prophet Joel, telling a community ravaged by a plague of locusts that they can turn to God. "Yet, even now," he tells them. Even after total decimation, it's not too late. Still come. When there is nowhere else to turn, "return to me with all your heart." It is an invitation for us too, when we find ourselves in a place of desolation or despair. "Even now, return to God." And what do we find when we do return? In a word, 'mercy.'

With beautiful, familiar words that we also encounter in the Psalms, Joel tells us of the God who is waiting for us to return – "gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love."

This phrase itself contains two words in Hebrew that are often translated as 'mercy'. The first is 'rachum', meaning 'merciful'. It is also sometimes translated as 'compassionate' and has its origin from the root word 'rechem' which means 'womb.' It evokes the intimate, tender love a mother has for her child, which comes from a place deep within, full of feeling and seeking to comfort. This is how God loves. As Isaiah says, "As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you." (Is 66:13)

When combined with the New Testament Greek word 'splogchnizomai' meaning 'compassion' and deriving from the word for 'bowels' (the feeling within our guts when we empathetically feel the suffering of another person), we can see that the biblical texts really invoke very corporal images to try to express the heartfelt response of God to our suffering and need - a God who feels our pain and wants to console us and give us hope.

The second word related to mercy in this text is 'hesed', translated here as 'steadfast love'. The richness of this word infers God's 'covenant loyalty,' his faithfulness to the relationship with his people, and with us. God doesn't sway from his commitment, he is constant and won't change his mind; he will keep his promises. We can trust in him and in our relationship with him. 'Hesed' is also translated as 'loving-kindness' – God's constant mercy, goodness and kindness as expressed in this covenant relationship. What a wonderful picture of a loving God from the Hebrew Scriptures.

This expressed feeling of the heart reminds us of the interior attitude we are called to bring to this Lent and carry through in the Year of Mercy. Joel calls the people to "rend (or tear) your hearts and not your clothing." Ultimately, it is about the heart – breaking it open and allowing it to feel deeply and respond. The ripped clothing (or sign of the ashes, or going to the sacrament of Reconciliation, or going to Mass) on

the outside needs to reflect the ripped heart on the inside or else the action lacks meaning. The Christian journey is one towards authenticity – the inside and the outside have to match.

Lent is a time to bring the heart back from where it has been and what has held it hostage, to open it up so that it can beat with mercy. Has it been hijacked by ceaseless activity? Has it been side-tracked into being faithful to what is not life-giving? Has it been shut closed because of resentment and stubbornness? Dare I open it?

Interestingly, the Latin word for 'mercy' is 'misericordia', and at its centre is 'cor' meaning 'heart'. Mercy is the heart's response to the suffering it sees and feels.

The Gospel today continues this theme of interior motive versus exterior appearance. Jesus points out that it is what happens "in secret" that matters, not visible or showy things that have no foundation. Are we ready for this interior journey of the heart this Lent? Where has my heart become hardened in the past year? Are we ready to allow mercy to flow from our hearts as a heartfelt response to the suffering of others?

"The mercy of God is not an abstract idea, but a concrete reality with which he reveals his love as 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". (*Misericordiae Vultus*, 6)

Key Passage

"Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them"
(Matthew 6:1)

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Looking pious is not enough for God. We have to translate faith into action. How can you make this a "season of active mercy?"
- Take a minute to stop and think about the people around you. To whom are you called to show more mercy during this Lent?



A Liberating Mercy

1ST SUNDAY OF LENT

1ST SUNDAY OF LENT

Deuteronomy 26: 4 - 10

When the priest takes the basket from your hand and sets it down before the altar of the LORD your God, you shall make this response before the LORD your God: "A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous. When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labour on us, we cried to the LORD, the God of our ancestors; the LORD heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. The LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that you, O LORD, have given me." You shall set it down before the LORD your God and bow down before the LORD your God.

Romans 10:8 - 13

But what does it say? "The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. The scripture says, "No one who believes in him will be put to shame."

For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. For, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

Luke 4:1-13

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread. Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'" Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, "To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'" Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

REFLECTION - A LIBERATING MERCY

Reflection by Pina Bernard

With Lent only having just begun, we are already thrown into the deep with the story of the testing of Jesus in the desert for 40 days. This passage calls to mind the Israelites during their own testing time in the desert for 40 years, where they didn't always hold fast to their trust in God. They complained and they made golden idols. Jesus, on the other hand, stays resolutely firm.

When it comes to being tested none of us is immune, and we can find ourselves giving in time and time again - to hurtful anger; to lies; to gossip; to being envious of others; to being spiteful; to pride. How can we begin to re-orient ourselves to more life-giving attitudes and behaviours this Lent?

Firstly, the Penitential Rite at Mass is a weekly 'check-up' that obliges us to look honestly at ourselves and bring to the Lord those things that are disconnecting us from God, each other and even ourselves. If embraced prayerfully and consciously each week, and with the Lord's help, this practice can really help to keep us focused on turning our mind and heart towards Christ.

But it is to the Sacrament of Penance that we turn when we feel burdened, and this is where God's mercy is most clearly evident. It can be discouraging, though, receiving the Sacrament, feeling truly repentant and wanting to change your life around, but then doing the same things again a short time later. The whole effort can seem pointless. Am I really getting anywhere? Why can't I change?

But God through the Holy Spirit is not idle. We may not be able to see a way forward, but God can, and often does, surprise us with a newness that we hadn't envisaged.

In my own faith life, I was troubled by a relationship that always seemed to be marked by negativity. Each encounter resulted in an argument or ill-feeling. I repeatedly brought it to the Sacrament of Penance. After some time, my Parish Priest said to me, "You have to find some way to deal with this issue at the time it arises." Unfortunately he didn't say exactly what it was that I should do!

As I left the confessional, a thought occurred to me. The words from Scripture, "blessing" and "curse", came into my mind. I realised I had a real choice – was I going to bring a blessing into these situations, or was I going to bring a curse? How I behaved and reacted was up to me – I could do good or I could do harm. There and then, I chose the blessing. When faced with such a decision, there was really only one choice. (*"See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse," Deuteronomy 11:26*)

So armed with this insight, I chose to pray for this person with whom I was having difficulty. I sincerely tried to offer a prayer for their wellbeing each time I met or

thought about this person. I found that I couldn't think badly of someone I was genuinely praying for, and the result was that much of the negativity that I was bringing dissipated. This was a real turning point - something in me had changed and a light had begun to shine in my darkness.

Through the Holy Spirit, I was given a tool to be able to unlock and break open what was keeping me bitter and angry for so long. I had found a new freedom that I hadn't been able to achieve on my own. This is the power of this Sacrament. It does feel good to get things off our chest, but it's much more - it's an encounter with the mercy of God.

In this Year of Mercy, Pope Francis wants everyone to experience it in their own way. It is a year marked by openness. The Holy Doors are open, and on 4-5 March, our Churches will be open for '24 Hours for the Lord.' It is an opportunity this Lent to simply come and be with God for prayer, Adoration and Reconciliation.

Pope Francis offers us a simple prayer:

“Lord, I am a sinner; come with your mercy!”

This is such a beautiful and easy prayer. It's an easy prayer to say every day. Every day.

“Lord, I am a sinner. Come with your mercy.”

In the first reading this week, we see our merciful God who saw the people's affliction and oppression and set them free. This is what Jesus did too for the people he met, and also what he desires for each of us - to set us free from what holds us bound.

“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” (*Misericordiae Vultus*, 3).

Let's be encouraged by these words to approach this Sacrament with courage and trust during this Year of Mercy, which Pope Francis has called a “time of great pardon”.

Key Passage

“The LORD heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression”
(Deuteronomy 26:7)

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Do I trust that God's mercy can bring me healing?
- How has the Sacrament of Penance helped me in my spiritual life?

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for Lent 2016 – Part 1

*“I desire mercy, and not sacrifice” (Mt 9:13).
The works of mercy on the road of the Jubilee*

1. *Mary, the image of a Church which evangelises because she is evangelised*

In the Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, I asked that “the season of Lent in this Jubilee Year be lived more intensely as a privileged moment to celebrate and experience God’s mercy” (*Misericordiae Vultus*, 17). By calling for an attentive listening to the word of God and encouraging the initiative “24 Hours for the Lord”, I sought to stress the primacy of prayerful listening to God’s word, especially his prophetic word. The mercy of God is a proclamation made to the world, a proclamation which each Christian is called to experience at first hand. For this reason, during the season of Lent I will send out Missionaries of Mercy as a concrete sign to everyone of God’s closeness and forgiveness.

After receiving the Good News told to her by the Archangel Gabriel, Mary, in her *Magnificat*, prophetically sings of the mercy whereby God chose her. The Virgin of Nazareth, betrothed to Joseph, thus becomes the perfect icon of the Church which evangelises, for she was, and continues to be, evangelised by the Holy Spirit, who made her virginal womb fruitful. In the prophetic tradition, mercy is strictly related even on the etymological level - to the maternal womb (*rahāmim*) and to a generous, faithful and compassionate goodness (*hesed*) shown within marriage and family relationships.





A Face of Mercy

2ND SUNDAY OF LENT

2ND SUNDAY OF LENT

Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18

After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, "Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great."

But Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" And Abram said, "You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir." But the word of the LORD came to him, "This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir." He brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your descendants be." And he believed the LORD; and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness.

Then he said to him, "I am the LORD who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess." But he said, "O Lord GOD, how am I to know that I shall possess it?" He said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." He brought him all these and cut them in two, laying each half over against the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and a deep and terrifying darkness descended upon him. When the sun had gone down and it was dark, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates,

Philippians 3:17 - 4:1

Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself.

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.

Luke 9:28-36

Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah" —not knowing what he said. While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

REFLECTION - A FACE OF MERCY

Reflection by Pina Bernard

We see many faces of Jesus in the Scriptures - the face of a newborn baby in the arms of his mother Mary; the face of a teenager who defiantly stays behind in the temple while his parents desperately try to find him; the compassionate face of a young preacher who walks from town to town bringing a message of hope and healing for people who know only oppression and illness; the bold face of a rabbi who debates the Pharisees and outwits them in all their arguments; the frustrated face of a teacher whose students do not understand what he is trying to tell them; the grieving face of one who has lost a friend; the resolute face of a man who sets his face towards Jerusalem; the suffering face of a man who is beaten and dies.

In this week's Transfiguration story, we see another face of Jesus - the glorious face. On that mountain, the appearance of his face changes, and his friends are privileged to see another side of Jesus that amazes them. Jesus reveals to them, and to us, the face of his Father, and most often it is a face of mercy.

Pope Francis speaks of the merciful gaze of Jesus. In a homily on 7 April 2013 he says:

Let us also remember Peter: three times he denied Jesus, precisely when he should have been closest to him. And when he hits rock 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!

More meaningful for Pope Francis is the story of the calling of Matthew (Mt 9:9), where Jesus sees Matthew at his tax-collection booth and calls him to follow. Pope Francis takes his episcopal motto from this event, "*miserando atque eligendo*," expressing how Jesus looked on Matthew with the eyes of mercy and chose him. Just like Matthew, Pope Francis could identify with being a sinner and being called by God in his mercy to the role he was being asked to assume.

"Here, this is me, a sinner on whom the Lord has turned his gaze." (Pope Francis commenting on "The Calling of St Matthew" by Caravaggio, 1600)

The gaze of Jesus doesn't leave us unchanged. It is always a gaze of love. It is the loving gaze of a parent towards his or her child, still loving despite the child's



weaknesses and shortcomings. It moves us; it invites us into relationship; it calls for a response. We are called to refract the love and mercy of the glorified, transfigured Jesus through our own bodies and out into the world.

It has been said that 'a person is enlightened', not 'when they get an idea', but 'when someone looks at them'. A person is enlightened when another person loves them. The eyes are windows on to the heart. They search the person out and have power to elicit life. ('The Impact of God' by Iain Matthew)

An ideal opportunity to sit in Jesus' gaze is the '24 Hours for the Lord' on 4-5 March. During Adoration in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament we can spend time with the Lord like with a friend. We look to the Lord's gaze, and he looks to ours. We open ourselves to his grace and mercy, and we wait in trust and confidence for however and whenever God chooses to reveal his grace and mercy to us.

Pope Francis asks, "When you look at the tabernacle, what do you do?... 'I speak, I talk, I think, I meditate, I listen...' Very good! But do you let yourself be looked at by the Lord? Letting ourselves be gazed upon by the Lord. He looks at us and this is itself a way of praying... know for sure that he is looking at you!"



In speaking of faces, the logo for the Year of Mercy also depicts the face of Christ, but it is joined to another face, a face which could be mine. Jesus' eye and my eye are one. The merciful gaze of Jesus on the world should be adopted by me when I gaze on the world. Can I be merciful like the Father? Can I love others despite their faults? Can I look tenderly on those who are despairing, in need or oppressed?

*You looked with love upon me
and deep within your eyes imprinted grace;
this mercy set me free,
held in your love's embrace,
to lift my eyes adoring to your face.*

St John of the Cross

Key Passage

"Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" (Luke 9:35)

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How do I feel when God looks at me in love?
- How do I think God feels when he looks at me? Can I accept his merciful gaze?

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for Lent 2016 – Part 2

2. God's covenant with humanity: a history of mercy

The mystery of divine mercy is revealed in the history of the covenant between God and his people Israel. God shows himself ever rich in mercy, ever ready to treat his people with deep tenderness and compassion, especially at those tragic moments when infidelity ruptures the bond of the covenant, which then needs to be ratified more firmly in justice and truth. Here is a true love story, in which God plays the role of the betrayed father and husband, while Israel plays the unfaithful child and bride. These domestic images - as in the case of Hosea (cf. Hos 1-2) - show to what extent God wishes to bind himself to his people.

This love story culminates in the incarnation of God's Son. In Christ, the Father pours forth his boundless mercy even to making him "mercy incarnate" (*Misericordiae Vultus*, 8). As a man, Jesus of Nazareth is a true son of Israel; he embodies that perfect hearing required of every Jew by the Shema, which today too is the heart of God's covenant with Israel: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" (Dt 6:4-5). As the Son of God, he is the Bridegroom who does everything to win over the love of his bride, to whom he is bound by an unconditional love which becomes visible in the eternal wedding feast.

This is the very heart of the apostolic kerygma, in which divine mercy holds a central and fundamental place. It is "the beauty of the saving love of God made manifest in Jesus Christ who died and rose from the dead" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 36), that first proclamation which "we must hear again and again in different ways, the one which we must announce one way or another throughout the process of catechesis, at every level and moment" (*ibid.*, 164). Mercy "expresses God's way of reaching out to the sinner, offering him a new chance to look at himself, convert, and believe" (*Misericordiae Vultus*, 21), thus restoring his relationship with him. In Jesus crucified, God shows his desire to draw near to sinners, however far they may have strayed from him. In this way he hopes to soften the hardened heart of his Bride.



Patient Mercy
3RD SUNDAY OF LENT

3RD SUNDAY OF LENT

Exodus 3:1- 8, 13-15

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

Then the LORD said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.

But Moses said to God, "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" God also said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'The LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you': This is my name forever, and this my title for all generations.

1 Corinthians 10:1-6, 10-12

I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them, and they were struck down in the wilderness.

Now these things occurred as examples for us, so that we might not desire evil as they did. And do not complain as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. These things happened to them to serve as an example, and they were written down to instruct us, on whom the ends of the ages have come. So if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall.

Luke 13:1-9

At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. He asked them, "Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did."

Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. So he said to the gardener, 'See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?' He replied, 'Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"

REFLECTION - PATIENT MERCY

Reflection by Deacon David McKenzie

In the first reading this Sunday, God identifies himself to Moses as, I AM, or Yahweh in Hebrew. When responding to the Pharisees' doubt about the resurrection, Jesus uses this passage to show that God is a living God. "I am the Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob". Our God is a living God, a God who was, who is and who will always be. A loving, merciful, patient God.

God told Moses to take his shoes off because he stood on holy ground. What made that ground holy? How was it different from any of the ground around it? The ground on which Moses stood surrounded the bush which blazed but did not burn. In the bush was God. Moses stood on ground before God and so the ground on which he stood was holy. When we stand before our God in our quiet place, we stand on holy ground too.

Why did God appear to Moses? Because God had heard the cries of God's people for salvation and had taken pity on them. God had resolved to set them free. God hears our cries. God sees our sufferings. And God, our merciful Father, resolves to set us free, to grant us salvation.

In the second part of today's Gospel, Jesus compares the God who always was and will be to a patient farmer. In ancient times when a tree was planted, you were forbidden to take fruit from it for three years, to allow the tree to take root and thrive. The fig tree in today's passage had been in the ground for the prescribed three years, but had not produced any fruit.

Rather than damn the tree as useless, "taking up the ground", the patient farmer proposes that it be left for another year, with the soil around it aerated by digging and the tree fertilised with manure. If there is no fruit after that extra year it can be cut down.

We can be like that tree. It can seem that we are not responding to the Gospel message, that we are not living as we should, for God and for others. We do not produce the fruit of love and compassion God seeks of us. Our Loving Father who is, who was and who will always be, with mercy and patience, "gives us another year". God digs around the soil of our lives with God's love and fertilises our souls with the Word.

What if after another year we still don't get it. Will we be damned like the people upon whom the tower fell or those slaughtered in the Temple? Thankfully we won't. God will give us another year and another and another. But we have to have the sense to receive the Word of God, to receive the love of God and to return that love and share the Word with others, before we run out of years.

Key Passage

'Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it.'
(Luke 13:8)

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What important work could bear fruit in your life right now if you have more confidence in God's loving care?
- As you continue to grow how is God growing in and with you?

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for Lent 2016 – Part 3

3. *The works of mercy*

God's mercy transforms human hearts; it enables us, through the experience of a faithful love, to become merciful in turn. In an ever new miracle, divine mercy shines forth in our lives, inspiring each of us to love our neighbour and to devote ourselves to what the Church's tradition calls the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. These works remind us that faith finds expression in concrete everyday actions meant to help our neighbours in body and spirit: by feeding, visiting, comforting and instructing them. On such things will we be judged. For this reason, I expressed my hope that "the Christian people may reflect on the corporal and spiritual works of mercy; this will be a way to reawaken our conscience, too often grown dull in the face of poverty, and to enter more deeply into the heart of the Gospel where the poor have a special experience of God's mercy" (ibid., 15). For in the poor, the flesh of Christ "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" (ibid.). It is the unprecedented and scandalous mystery of the extension in time of the suffering of the Innocent Lamb, the burning bush of gratuitous love. Before this love, we can, like Moses, take off our sandals (cf. Ex 3:5), especially when the poor are our brothers or sisters in Christ who are suffering for their faith.



Father of Mercy

4TH SUNDAY OF LENT

4TH SUNDAY OF LENT

Joshua 5:9-12

The LORD said to Joshua, "Today I have rolled away from you the disgrace of Egypt." And so that place is called Gilgal to this day.

While the Israelites were camped in Gilgal they kept the passover in the evening on the fourteenth day of the month in the plains of Jericho. On the day after the passover, on that very day, they ate the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. The manna ceased on the day they ate the produce of the land, and the Israelites no longer had manna; they ate the crops of the land of Canaan that year.

2 Corinthians 5:17-21

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them." So he told them this parable. Jesus said, "There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and travelled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands."' So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe—the

best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!’ And they began to celebrate. “Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.’ Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father, ‘Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!’ Then the father said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.’”

REFLECTION - FATHER OF MERCY

Reflection by Deacon David McKenzie

The story of the Prodigal Son is very familiar to us. Most of us think the son who spent his inheritance a waster and the son who stayed at home rightfully put out by the Father's welcome home of that waster. But by focusing on the two sons, we are missing the real focus of this Gospel: the loving, forgiving, merciful Father. Neither of the sons seems worthy of their Father's love. One turned his back on that love and the other expected it as his rightful due.

Henri Nouwen, a Dutch Catholic priest and academic, has written an excellent book entitled *The Return of the Prodigal Son*. His inspiration for the book came from a magnificent painting by another Dutchman, Rembrandt, also called the Return of the Prodigal Son. In that painting the Father sits in the centre, bathed in light wearing luxurious robes, a man of a great age who has seen it all and yet still loves, still forgives. The Father is clasping to his chest his younger son who is bathed in the light emanating from the Father. The younger son is in his underclothes with one sandal dangling off his dirty feet. His shaven head is lying against the Father's chest where the Father's heart would be. He is a pitiful wreck of a man who is being loved back to life by his merciful Father. The elder son stands at the edge of the light looking down his nose disdainfully at Father and son/brother. He is too full of his own pride to see that he too is forgiven by the Father who has given him all that he has.

Nouwen studied the painting at great length. He saw himself as the younger son, given so much yet not appreciating what he had. Headstrong, wilful, doing what he wanted for his own glory, rather than working for the glory of God who makes us all that we are. He then saw himself as the older brother, proud of his achievements, complaining when others with lesser talent were rewarded. He longed to be the Father, with wisdom beyond time, forgiving the sons, loving the sons, giving the sons life.

In this precious season of Lent let us take some time to reflect on our merciful Father who loves us not because we have earned that love, who loves us despite our failings and inadequacies. Our Father loves us because our Father loves us, because our Father loves us. Nothing we can do will win that love and nothing we can do will lose it. Our Father forgives us despite what we have done or what we have not done. Our merciful Father forgives us because our merciful Father loves us and always will. And for this we rejoice.

"If I am able to look at the world with the eyes of God's love and discover that God's vision is not that of a stereotypical landowner or patriarch but rather that of an all-giving and forgiving father who does not measure out his love to his children according to how well they behave, then I quickly see that my only true response can be deep gratitude." – Henri Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son*.

Key passage

"Then the father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.'" (Luke 15:31-32)

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Like the younger son, when have you been lost and then found by the merciful and compassionate Father who loves you?
- What are some ways people have been merciful and forgiving toward you? How can you practice forgiving others?

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for Lent 2016 – Part 4

In the light of this love, which is strong as death (cf. Song 8:6), the real poor are revealed as those who refuse to see themselves as such. They consider themselves rich, but they are actually the poorest of the poor. This is because they are slaves to sin, which leads them to use wealth and power not for the service of God and others, but to stifle within their hearts the profound sense that they too are only poor beggars. The greater their power and wealth, the more this blindness and deception can grow. It can even reach the point of being blind to Lazarus begging at their doorstep (cf. Lk 16:20-21). Lazarus, the poor man, is a figure of Christ, who through the poor pleads for our conversion. As such, he represents the possibility of conversion which God offers us and which we may well fail to see. Such blindness is often accompanied by the proud illusion of our own omnipotence, which reflects in a sinister way the diabolical “you will be like God” (Gen 3:5) which is the root of all sin. This illusion can likewise take social and political forms, as shown by the totalitarian systems of the twentieth century, and, in our own day, by the ideologies of monopolizing thought and technoscience, which would make God irrelevant and reduce man to raw material to be exploited. This illusion can also be seen in the sinful structures linked to a model of false development based on the idolatry of money, which leads to lack of concern for the fate of the poor on the part of wealthier individuals and societies; they close their doors, refusing even to see the poor.



Justice and Mercy

5TH SUNDAY OF LENT

5TH SUNDAY OF LENT

Isaiah 43:16-21

Thus says the LORD, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters, who brings out chariot and horse, army and warrior; they lie down, they cannot rise, they are extinguished, quenched like a wick: Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. The wild animals will honour me, the jackals and the ostriches; for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, the people whom I formed for myself so that they might declare my praise.

Philippians 3:8-14

I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

John 8:1-11

While Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, they said to him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus straightened up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, sir." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again."

REFLECTION - JUSTICE AND MERCY

Reflection by Deacon David McKenzie

A woman has been caught in the very act of adultery. One wonders how that came about. The woman is dragged before Jesus. One wonders where the man is. Why is the woman singled out? Perhaps the man was a gentile, perhaps a Roman soldier. Did the Law of Moses apply to her but not the man?

The Scribes and Pharisees shame the woman, making a public spectacle of her. How did she feel publicly humiliated before family, friends and neighbours? They tell Jesus what the Law says, the woman is an adulteress, she must die. They have judged her. From their moral high ground they look down at her. They are judge and jury. They long to be executioner as well. How easy it is to judge another. We see their failings. We try. We judge.

How does Jesus react? That is why the Scribes and Pharisees have caused this shameful charade to come to pass. To see how Jesus reacts, hopefully to judge him, to find him wanting, to cause others to doubt him.

How does Jesus react?

Seemingly he doesn't. He seems to ignore them, doodling in the dirt. He ignores their play acting. He ignores the inference that he does not know what the Law of Moses states. He ignores their attempt to put him to the test. They persist. They won't be denied their sport.

How does Jesus react?

He bent down again and wrote in the dirt again and he challenged THEM, "If there is one among you who has not sinned, let him be the first to throw a stone at her". The tables are turned. How do THEY, the accusers, the judges, the jury, react? They walk away, starting with the eldest. THEY are shamed. They have been tried and found wanting and they know it.

The woman remains. No-one is left to condemn her, to judge, to execute, no-one except Jesus. Jesus says to the woman, "Neither do I condemn you, go away and don't sin anymore." Our Lord who does not judge, our Lord who does not condemn sends us off saying, "Go and don't sin anymore." We are forgiven, we can start afresh. Every time we fall Jesus is there not to condemn but to pick us up and say to us, "Go and sin no more." How humbling is that!

Jesus bends down and starts writing with his finger on the ground. St Augustine notes that this gesture portrays Christ as the divine legislator: in fact, God wrote the law with his finger on tablets of stone. Thus Jesus is the Legislator, he is Justice in person. And what is his sentence? "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her". These words are full of the disarming power of truth that pulls down the wall of hypocrisy and opens consciences to a greater justice, that of love, in which consists the fulfilment of every precept.

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI

God does not forgive evil but the individual, and he teaches us to distinguish the evil act, which as such must be condemned, from the person who has committed it, to whom he offers the possibility of changing. While man tends to identify the sinner with his sin, closing every escape, the heavenly Father instead has sent his Son into the world to offer everyone a way to salvation.

Pope John Paul II

Key Passage

Jesus straightened up and said, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." (John 8:7)

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How can you resist the feelings of desiring to "cast the first stone" when you disapprove of someone's behaviour?
- How can you show respectful mercy?

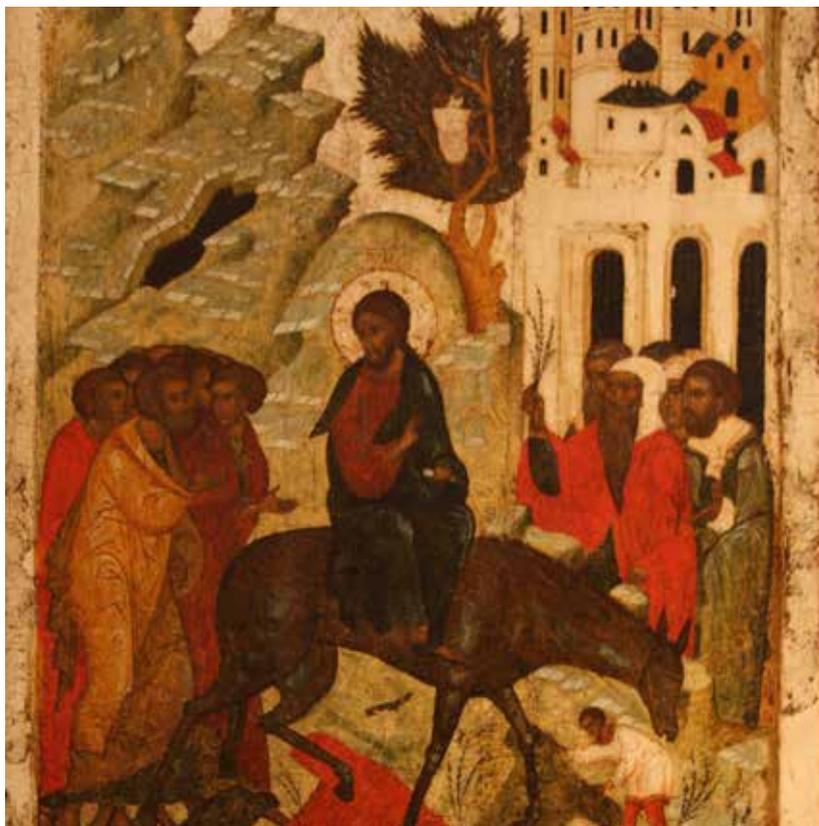
FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for Lent 2016 – Part 5

For all of us, then, the season of Lent in this Jubilee Year is a favourable time to overcome our existential alienation by listening to God's word and by practising the works of mercy. In the corporal works of mercy we touch the flesh of Christ in our brothers and sisters who need to be fed, clothed, sheltered, visited; in the spiritual works of mercy - counsel, instruction, forgiveness, admonishment and prayer – we touch more directly our own sinfulness. The corporal and spiritual works of mercy must never be separated. By touching the flesh of the crucified Jesus in the suffering, sinners can receive the gift of realizing that they too are poor and in need. By taking this path, the "proud", the "powerful" and the "wealthy" spoken of in the Magnificat can also be embraced and undeservedly loved by the crucified Lord who died and rose for them. This love alone is the answer to that yearning for infinite happiness and love that we think we can satisfy with the idols of knowledge, power and riches. Yet the danger always remains that by a constant refusal to open the doors of their hearts to Christ who knocks on them in the poor, the proud, rich and powerful will end up condemning themselves and plunging into the eternal abyss of solitude which is Hell. The pointed words of Abraham apply to them and to all of us: "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them" (Lk 16:29). Such attentive listening will best prepare us to celebrate the final victory over sin and death of the Bridegroom, now risen, who desires to purify his Betrothed in expectation of his coming.

Let us not waste this season of Lent, so favourable a time for conversion! We ask this through the maternal intercession of the Virgin Mary, who, encountering the greatness of God's mercy freely bestowed upon her, was the first to acknowledge her lowliness (cf. Lk 1:48) and to call herself the Lord's humble servant (cf. Lk 1:38).

*From the Vatican, 4 October 2015
Feast of Saint Francis of Assisi*



Forgiving Mercy

PALM SUNDAY

PALM SUNDAY OF THE PASSION OF THE LORD

Isaiah 50:4-7

The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning he wakens— wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught. The Lord GOD has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I did not turn backward. I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting. The Lord GOD helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame.

Philippians 2:6-11

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Luke 22:14 - 23:56

When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. He said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, "Take this and divide it among yourselves; for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.

But see, the one who betrays me is with me, and his hand is on the table. For the Son of Man is going as it has been determined, but woe to that one by whom he is betrayed!" Then they began to ask one another, which one of them it could be who would do this. A dispute also arose among them as to which one of them was to be regarded as the greatest. But he said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves. "You are those who have stood by me in my trials; and I confer on you, just as my Father has conferred on me, a kingdom, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and

you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. "Simon, Simon, listen! Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your own faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned back, strengthen your brothers." And he said to him, "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death!" Jesus said, "I tell you, Peter, the cock will not crow this day, until you have denied three times that you know me." He said to them, "When I sent you out without a purse, bag, or sandals, did you lack anything?" They said, "No, not a thing." He said to them, "But now, the one who has a purse must take it, and likewise a bag. And the one who has no sword must sell his cloak and buy one. For I tell you, this scripture must be fulfilled in me, 'And he was counted among the lawless'; and indeed what is written about me is being fulfilled." They said, "Lord, look, here are two swords." He replied, "It is enough."

He came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him. When he reached the place, he said to them, "Pray that you may not come into the time of trial." Then he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, knelt down, and prayed, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done." Then an angel from heaven appeared to him and gave him strength. In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground. When he got up from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping because of grief, and he said to them, "Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not come into the time of trial."

While he was still speaking, suddenly a crowd came, and the one called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him; but Jesus said to him, "Judas, is it with a kiss that you are betraying the Son of Man?" When those who were around him saw what was coming, they asked, "Lord, should we strike with the sword?" Then one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. But Jesus said, "No more of this!" And he touched his ear and healed him. Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple police, and the elders who had come for him, "Have you come out with swords and clubs as if I were a bandit? When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness!"

Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest's house. But Peter was following at a distance. When they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat among them. Then a servant-girl, seeing him in the firelight, stared at him and said, "This man also was with him." But he denied it, saying, "Woman, I do not know him." A little later someone else, on seeing him, said, "You also are one of them." But Peter said, "Man, I am not!" Then about an hour later still another kept insisting, "Surely this man also was with him; for he is a Galilean." But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about!" At that moment, while he was still speaking, the cock crowed. The Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, "Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly.

Now the men who were holding Jesus began to mock him and beat him; they also blindfolded him and kept asking him, "Prophecy! Who is it that struck you?" They kept heaping many other

insults on him. When day came, the assembly of the elders of the people, both chief priests and scribes, gathered together, and they brought him to their council. They said, "If you are the Messiah, tell us." He replied, "If I tell you, you will not believe; and if I question you, you will not answer. But from now on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God." All of them asked, "Are you, then, the Son of God?" He said to them, "You say that I am." Then they said, "What further testimony do we need? We have heard it ourselves from his own lips!"

Then the assembly rose as a body and brought Jesus before Pilate. They began to accuse him, saying, "We found this man perverting our nation, forbidding us to pay taxes to the emperor, and saying that he himself is the Messiah, a king." Then Pilate asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" He answered, "You say so." Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, "I find no basis for an accusation against this man." But they were insistent and said, "He stirs up the people by teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee where he began even to this place." When Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. And when he learned that he was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him off to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at that time. When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had been wanting to see him for a long time, because he had heard about him and was hoping to see him perform some sign. He questioned him at some length, but Jesus gave him no answer. The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him. Even Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him; then he put an elegant robe on him, and sent him back to Pilate. That same day Herod and Pilate became friends with each other; before this they had been enemies.

Pilate then called together the chief priests, the leaders, and the people, and said to them, "You brought me this man as one who was perverting the people; and here I have examined him in your presence and have not found this man guilty of any of your charges against him. Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us. Indeed, he has done nothing to deserve death. I will therefore have him flogged and release him." Then they all shouted out together, "Away with this fellow! Release Barabbas for us!" (This was a man who had been put in prison for an insurrection that had taken place in the city, and for murder.) Pilate, wanting to release Jesus, addressed them again; but they kept shouting, "Crucify, crucify him!" A third time he said to them, "Why, what evil has he done? I have found in him no ground for the sentence of death; I will therefore have him flogged and then release him." But they kept urgently demanding with loud shouts that he should be crucified; and their voices prevailed. So Pilate gave his verdict that their demand should be granted. He released the man they asked for, the one who had been put in prison for insurrection and murder, and he handed Jesus over as they wished.

As they led him away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming from the country, and they laid the cross on him, and made him carry it behind Jesus. A great number of the people followed him, and among them were women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him. But Jesus turned to them and said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For the days are surely coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed.' Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us'; and to the hills, 'Cover us.' For if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?"

Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." And they cast lots to divide his clothing. And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!" The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews." One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, while the sun's light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Having said this, he breathed his last. When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, "Certainly this man was innocent." And when all the crowds who had gathered there for this spectacle saw what had taken place, they returned home, beating their breasts. But all his acquaintances, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

Now there was a good and righteous man named Joseph, who, though a member of the council, had not agreed to their plan and action. He came from the Jewish town of Arimathea, and he was waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then he took it down, wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid it in a rock-hewn tomb where no one had ever been laid. It was the day of Preparation, and the sabbath was beginning. The women who had come with him from Galilee followed, and they saw the tomb and how his body was laid. Then they returned, and prepared spices and ointments. On the sabbath they rested according to the commandment.

REFLECTION - FORGIVING MERCY

Reflection by Deacon David McKenzie

Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord starts with a commemoration of Jesus' entry in to Jerusalem. The Gospel is the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Luke. On Good Friday we will listen to the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John. Let us leave our Lord's Passion to Good Friday, save to say that in Luke, having been falsely accused, unjustly tried and convicted to death, scourged savagely and finally stripped of his clothes and nailed to a cross where he hung naked between two thieves, Jesus with his dying breath gasped, "Father forgive them, they do not know what they are doing." From the Cross our Lord forgave and asked the Father for forgiveness of those who do not know what they are doing. How mind blowing! Despite the blood, the pain, the humiliation, the agony, Jesus rose above all that, above all who tormented him, who abused him, who insulted him and Jesus forgave. How great thou art, my Lord and my God.

Only a few short days before he hung on the Cross, Jesus rode triumphantly into Jerusalem. He rode on the colt of an ass. In ancient times when the king went to war, he rode through the town on his war horse gathering the troops. Victorious, he rode back into town on a donkey to show that the land was at peace. Jesus, Our Merciful Lord, the Prince of Peace, rode on a donkey.

Jesus rode through the stone walls of Jerusalem. Jesus, our merciful Lord, our Prince of Peace rides through the stone walls of our hearts into the depth of our souls. As Jesus rode, the people lay palm branches in front of him. The Romans took things back to Rome to show they had been victorious. They took palm trees back to Rome to show they were victorious in the Middle East. Our merciful Lord, our Prince of Peace, soon to be victorious over death, had palm fronds placed in front of him as a symbol of that victory.

The crowds shouted, "Hosanna in the Highest", cheering Jesus on. The word hosanna (Latin osanna, Greek ὡσαννά, *hōsanná*) is from Hebrew *hōshia-nā'* which is short for *hōšî'â-nā'* from Aramaic meaning "save, rescue, saviour". In a liturgical context, it refers to a cry expressing an appeal for divine help.

In Jewish liturgy, the word "Hosanna" is applied specifically to the Hoshana Service, a cycle of prayers from which a selection is sung each morning during Sukkot, the Feast of Booths or Tabernacles. The complete cycle is sung on the seventh day of the festival, which is called Hoshana Rabbah ("Great Hosanna"). "Hosanna" was the shout of praise or adoration made in recognition of the Messiahship of Jesus on his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name

of the Lord!" It is used in the same way in Christian praise, especially on Palm Sunday, which commemorates that event, and in the Sanctus and Benedictus prayers recited during the Eucharist.

On Jesus' entry into Jerusalem the crowd called for his divine help to save them. In a few days they would yell, "Take him away. Take him away. Crucify him. Crucify him." And from the Cross Jesus forgave them, "Father forgive them, they do not know what they are doing." When we pray the Our Father we pray, "Forgive us our sins as we forgive others". Do we have the courage to say, "Father forgive them, they do not know what they are doing?" Are we the ones who need forgiving? Is it us who don't know what we are doing?



Key passage

"The Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, "Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times." (Luke 22:61)

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- When have you felt that you betrayed the confidence of another, as Peter did when he denied Jesus?
- How do you forgive yourself?

THE EASTER TRIDUUM

Reflection by Rev Dr John Frauenfelder

Our long journey to the font culminates in the Easter Triduum. These three days draw us into the mystery of our salvation. Whatever we are doing these days, it is hoped that "Reflections on Mercy: A Lectio Divina for the Jubilee Year of Mercy", may assist you to be open to the graces these days offer.

Each morning, we can pause to acknowledge the meaning of the day ahead. Each night, we can give thanks. At all times, we can acknowledge God's mercy bestowed upon us in abundance so that we might know the depth of the love being offered us, and the power of the gift of life won for us.

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. (*Misericordiae Vultus, 10*)



Attentive Mercy
THURSDAY OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

THURSDAY OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14

The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: This month shall mark for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you. Tell the whole congregation of Israel that on the tenth of this month they are to take a lamb for each family, a lamb for each household. If a household is too small for a whole lamb, it shall join its closest neighbour in obtaining one; the lamb shall be divided in proportion to the number of people who eat of it. Your lamb shall be without blemish, a year-old male; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month; then the whole assembled congregation of Israel shall slaughter it at twilight. They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. They shall eat the lamb that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs

This is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it hurriedly. It is the passover of the LORD. For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both human beings and animals; on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD. The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live: when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt. This day shall be a day of remembrance for you. You shall celebrate it as a festival to the LORD; throughout your generations you shall observe it as a perpetual ordinance.

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

John 13:1-15

Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. He came to Simon

Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you." For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean." After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

REFLECTION - ATTENTIVE MERCY

Reflection by Very Rev Dr David Ranson VG

One of the most significant anthropologists in the 20th century was Margaret Mead. Mead was once asked what sign we had about when civilisation began. The expectation was that her reply would concern the discovery of some ancient artefact such as a tool, or a weapon, or a segment of art. Instead, she simply replied, "a healed femur." Why did Mead claim this? She claimed this because for the first time we had an indication that a community had cared for someone. Previously, there would be no evidence of a healed femur, for the person who had experienced a broken femur would be left to die. There comes a point in human history, however, when someone with a broken femur is cared for. Since a broken femur takes many months to heal, the person whose healed bone was discovered would have been cared for consistently for a good length of time. Their every need would have required attention. For Margaret Mead the indication of this attention was the sure sign of the beginning of human civilisation. Human civilisation begins as the culture of care is evidenced, a culture in which human beings give themselves over to one another in care for each other.

If this be so for human civilisation, then the 'divine civilisation', as it were, itself becomes apparent on this evening. It does not begin on this evening but it is given its greatest transparency. It is given its truest indication and we are left the surest mark of its realisation, so to speak. Divine civilisation becomes apparent in the simple gesture of Jesus own care of his friends. He washes their feet. In Jesus, God becomes absorbed in service of us and in his attention to the most humble part of ourselves.

God is attention without distraction, declared the great mystic of the 1930s, Simone Weil. God attends to us in all that we consider all too-human for him to become involved: in the ambiguous ways in which we search for love in our life; the uncertainties we have about our identity and our future; the angst that consumes us about our children and that keeps us awake at night; our fears about our partners and how we can maintain them in the bonds of relationship; in the helplessness we feel in the face of the demise of someone we love but feel powerless to assist; in the memories that haunt us; in the failures and mistakes of our life that continue to subvert our best aspirations; in our struggle to believe, to hope and to trust. If Jesus washes the feet of his friends, these are the experiences with which he involves himself. It is to these experiences of our life, and more, that he attends. As he says to Peter, he says to us, "if I do not find you there in those experiences in which you discover the weight of your humanity, you cannot understand me."

As God washes our feet, we wash each others. For Simone Weil "compassion consists in paying attention to the one who is afflicted and identifying oneself with [them]

in thought." For Weil, attention is the key that opens the door to compassion for those suffering; "Those who are unhappy have no need for anything in this world but people capable of giving them their attention." Human attention means "giving to those who have been stripped of their humanity an existence apart from their affliction." It is an action requiring considerable sensitivity, courage and sacrifice - a detachment from self and a complete focus on the other person. It is mercy that was required millennia ago to heal a broken femur.

As it is with us, so too it is with God himself in Jesus. In other words, human civilisation begins when it starts to mirror the divine civilisation as disclosed in the story of this evening. May the divine civilisation of attention, care and involvement that we celebrate this evening as God in Jesus washes us and feeds us in the starkness of our humanity, become the model of what constructs our human civilisation.

For in the story of this night divine civilisation and human civilisation have become united.

Key Passage

Jesus said, "If I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you." (John 13:14-15)

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What is the most difficult thing you have done as a service to another person?
- For you, what does it mean to serve others?



Hopeful Mercy

FRIDAY OF THE LORD'S PASSION

FRIDAY OF THE PASSION OF THE LORD

Isaiah 52:13 - 53:12

See, my servant shall prosper; he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high. Just as there were many who were astonished at him—so marred was his appearance, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of mortals - so he shall startle many nations; kings shall shut their mouths because of him; for that which had not been told them they shall see, and that which they had not heard they shall contemplate.

Who has believed what we have heard? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces he was despised, and we held him of no account.

Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By a perversion of justice he was taken away. Who could have imagined his future? For he was cut off from the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people. They made his grave with the wicked and his tomb with the rich, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.

Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him with pain. When you make his life an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring, and shall prolong his days; through him the will of the LORD shall prosper. Out of his anguish he shall see light; he shall find satisfaction through his knowledge. The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will allot him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he poured out himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

Hebrews 4:14-16, 5:7:9

Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him,

John 18:1 - 19:42

After Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the Kidron valley to a place where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, because Jesus often met there with his disciples. So Judas brought a detachment of soldiers together with police from the chief priests and the Pharisees, and they came there with lanterns and torches and weapons. Then Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, came forward and asked them, 'For whom are you looking?' They answered, 'Jesus of Nazareth.' Jesus replied, 'I am he.' Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. When Jesus said to them, 'I am he', they stepped back and fell to the ground. Again he asked them, 'For whom are you looking?' And they said, 'Jesus of Nazareth.' Jesus answered, 'I told you that I am he. So if you are looking for me, let these men go.' This was to fulfil the word that he had spoken, 'I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me.' Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it, struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear. The slave's name was Malchus. Jesus said to Peter, 'Put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?'

So the soldiers, their officer, and the Jewish police arrested Jesus and bound him. First they took him to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was better to have one person die for the people.

Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, but Peter was standing outside at the gate. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out, spoke to the woman who guarded the gate, and brought Peter in. The woman said to Peter, 'You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?' He said, 'I am not.' Now the slaves and the police had made a charcoal fire because it was cold, and they were standing round it and warming themselves. Peter also was standing with them and warming himself.

Then the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching. Jesus answered, 'I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. Why do you ask me? Ask those who heard what I said to them; they know what I said.' When he had said this, one of the police standing nearby struck Jesus on the face, saying, 'Is that how you answer the high priest?' Jesus answered, 'If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong. But if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?' Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They asked him, 'You are not also one of his disciples, are you?' He denied it and said, 'I am not.' One of the slaves of the high priest,

a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, 'Did I not see you in the garden with him?' Again Peter denied it, and at that moment the cock crowed.

Then they took Jesus from Caiaphas to Pilate's headquarters. It was early in the morning. They themselves did not enter the headquarters, so as to avoid ritual defilement and to be able to eat the Passover. So Pilate went out to them and said, 'What accusation do you bring against this man?' They answered, 'If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you.' Pilate said to them, 'Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law.' The Jews replied, 'We are not permitted to put anyone to death.' (This was to fulfil what Jesus had said when he indicated the kind of death he was to die.)

Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, 'Are you the King of the Jews?' Jesus answered, 'Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?' Pilate replied, 'I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?' Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.' Pilate asked him, 'So you are a king?' Jesus answered, 'You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.' Pilate asked him, 'What is truth?'

After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again and told them, 'I find no case against him. But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover. Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?' They shouted in reply, 'Not this man, but Barabbas!' Now Barabbas was a bandit.

Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they dressed him in a purple robe. They kept coming up to him, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' and striking him on the face. Pilate went out again and said to them, 'Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no case against him.' So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, 'Here is the man!' When the chief priests and the police saw him, they shouted, 'Crucify him! Crucify him!' Pilate said to them, 'Take him yourselves and crucify him; I find no case against him.' The Jews answered him, 'We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God.'

Now when Pilate heard this, he was more afraid than ever. He entered his headquarters again and asked Jesus, 'Where are you from?' But Jesus gave him no answer. Pilate therefore said to him, 'Do you refuse to speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?' Jesus answered him, 'You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.' From then on Pilate tried to release him, but the Jews cried out, 'If you release this man, you are no friend of the emperor. Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the emperor.'

When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus outside and sat on the judge's bench at a place called The Stone Pavement, or in Hebrew Gabbatha. Now it was the day of Preparation for the Passover; and it was about noon. He said to the Jews, 'Here is your King!' They cried out, 'Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!' Pilate asked them, 'Shall I crucify your King?' The chief priests answered, 'We have no king but the emperor.' Then he handed him over to them to be crucified.

So they took Jesus; and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them. Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, 'Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.' Many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, 'Do not write, "The King of the Jews", but, "This man said, I am King of the Jews."' Pilate answered, 'What I have written I have written.' When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. So they said to one another, 'Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it.' This was to fulfil what the scripture says,

*'They divided my clothes among themselves,
and for my clothing they cast lots.'
And that is what the soldiers did.*

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.' Then he said to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfil the scripture), 'I am thirsty.' A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the wine, he said, 'It is finished.' Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Since it was the day of Preparation, the Jews did not want the bodies left on the cross during the sabbath, especially because that sabbath was a day of great solemnity. So they asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified men broken and the bodies removed. Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. (He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth.) These things occurred so that the scripture might be fulfilled, 'None of his bones shall be broken.' And again another passage of scripture says, 'They will look on the one whom they have pierced.'

After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

REFLECTION - HOPEFUL MERCY

Reflection by Very Rev Dr David Ranson VG

The heart of Mercy holds the agony of the world. We hold the agony of our own hearts. We hold our agony in the same way as Mary held the dead, lifeless body of Jesus taken from the Cross. We see that dead, abandoned body of Jesus in the world's agony now. We see the body of the crucified One in those whom the world has abandoned, in those parts of our own heart that are broken. We hold the body of the Crucified One when we hold the agony of those who are now crucified by the world's greed, by the world's neglect.

We hold the Crucified One. With anxious, helpless ardour, like Mary the Mother of Jesus who holds her dead son in agony, with the heart of mercy we gaze towards heaven, our hearts full of question. As we hold the agony of others and as we hold our own agony, we are full of question. And no answer comes. As for Mary, as she held her dead Son, as for us, there is only Silence and our pain is felt only more. Yet now, as on that first Good Friday, the Silence calls forth a depth of hope we barely imagined possible and our hope fills the Silence. It is our hope that fills the Silence. The heart of Mercy holds the world's agony but we also allow hope to rise in its hearts. It cannot avoid the question that it might be a hope in vain.

Yet, in our waiting a word comes to us. It is the word of memory – the memory that one man's hope was not disappointed. In our own hope we remember the heart of hope that was in Jesus himself, a hope that rose in the Silence, and not without its waiting, was given its answer. In the story of Jesus' own agony, in the story of his own hope, we are ultimately reminded that our hope is not in vain. For in the story of Jesus our hope has been given a Promise. Thus our agony is not the tomb in which we are consigned to remain trapped forever and in which we must despair. In Christ, even in the midst of the world's agony, our hope becomes the avenue into an unimagined possibility.

Mercy transforms grief into hope. Mercy is thoroughly paschal in character. It looks squarely at death and affirms life, it looks at absence and proclaims presence; it stands at dead ends and celebrates new beginnings. Mercy is the midwife delivering hope from the body of grief. In Hebrew, the word for 'mercy' is the same for 'womb.' Having Mercy in the Hebrew mind is about the engagement of a creative love which is like the pangs of birth. Having Mercy means experiencing the pain of bringing the dead to life, of liberating, and loosing those who are bound. The Mercy of God is passionate life-giving creativity. It is redemptive love. It is love that knows and understands the forces of negativity but which has been able to affirm something more than the darkness. It is love that, even in the confusion of darkness, has been

sensitive to the flicker of light present in human love, hope and transcendence. Whilst naming the darkness, a heart of mercy can also name this light and celebrate this light. It is love that has understood that this flicker of transcendent light is in fact altogether potent and dispels even the darkest darkness and that it cannot be extinguished by the darkest darkness.

The heart of Mercy is the one who has listened ever so deeply, reverently and attentively to the true situation of people and spoken out a word in which the people can recognise their truth. The voice of Mercy speaks out a word which, because it captures the truth of people, seizes their imagination and invites them into a new way of living, and onto a pathway which will not rob them of their humanity but which offers them fresh and constructive means of living out their humanity with one another. The voice of Mercy does not condemn. Rather, it invites, it opens up new vistas, new horizons for the imagination. It does not tell people what they should be doing. It invites them to wonder how they could be. It is a word which reminds us deep in our hearts that forgiveness is stronger than vengeance, that love is more enduring than hatred, that hope is brighter than despair, that life is stronger than death. As people of Mercy we are the people who live by this word. We are the people to whom this word has been entrusted. That word will enable us to act differently than the predicted concerns of the world dictate to us. And that word leads us into a life of celebration. It is a celebration of the freedom we have now because of that word, of the beauty that we can create now because of that word, and of joy that we can share now because of that word.

Key passage

“When you make his life an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring, and shall prolong his days; through him the will of the Lord shall prosper.” (Isaiah 53: 10)

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How has the compassionate God been present to you in your experiences of physical or emotional suffering?



The Light of Mercy

SUNDAY OF THE RESURRECTION

SUNDAY OF THE RESURRECTION

Acts 10:34, 37-43

Then Peter began to speak to them: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality. That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

1 Corinthians 5:6-8

Your boasting is not a good thing. Do you not know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough?

Clean out the old yeast so that you may be a new batch, as you really are unleavened. For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed. Therefore, let us celebrate the festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

John 20:1-9

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes.

REFLECTION - THE LIGHT OF MERCY

Reflection by Very Rev Dr David Ranson VG

Even in a world of electricity, there is something in us that keeps turning to the light of candles when we wish to express something profoundly important for us. It is a light full of invitation, and without threat, in which our shadows are not eradicated but held and accepted. The light of the candle extends a glow which warms us from the inside out, rather than which burns us up in its glare. How appropriate it is that we enter into the Mystery of the Resurrection through the use of a candle. As the darkness settles around us on the night before Easter we light a candle and celebrate that a light has shone which the darkness around us cannot extinguish. We gather to proclaim the power of this light. It is the light that is the risen life of Christ in our midst.

The light of Christ shines, now, in our own time, and in our own place, as a light shines in the darkness of our own self-preoccupation through the lives of those people whose self-giving reflects God's own self-giving to us. The light of Christ continues to shine; it shines in those places which at first might appear very ordinary and obscure – the house next door, the house down the street, our own struggling heart. Yet, often in these houses and hearts, there shines a light in the darkness - the light which is the life of God evident around us in undramatic, but nonetheless, silently heroic ways through lives which reflect God's own self-giving. We all know them. They are not far from us. They live in our parish. They live in our streets. They live in our neighborhoods. They are members of our own family. They may even be us.

Think of the parents, for example, who receive the trauma of a disabled child, and whose lives are never their own again, as they spend all their energy in the care of their child. In their life, a light shines in the darkness. Think of the mother or father of a teenager who is discovered with a mental illness, and spends so many years in anxiety, never really resting, coping with the unpredictability of the condition. In their life, a light shines in the darkness of a question that resists its answer. Think of the person whose own mother or father is aged and frail, and who turns their life upside down, as they commit to an unknown future caring for their parent – the person who forgets their own needs and spends many years in care of someone whom they love. In their life, too, a light shines in the darkness of anxiety. Think of the spouse who watches in agony as their partner falls victim to a dementia, and who stays awake, in so many hidden ways, day and night to enable the one falling ill with dignity. Through their love, a light shines in the darkness of despair. Think of the person in a failed relationship, who despite the intensity of the hurt, refuses to extract vengeance on their partner, and who patiently and gently works for what might bring the most healing to all in the situation. In their openness, a light shines in the darkness of

bitterness. Think of those people who spend untold hours in a volunteer capacity for many different causes, raising money, giving of their time, often with no gratitude or acknowledgement, but only with the commitment to make lighter the suffering of others. In their self-donation, a light shines in the darkness of our own selfishness.

When we can see a light that overpowers the darkness, we can perceive such light and utter deep in our hearts, "Christ is Risen! Can you not see it!" then we know how such light makes our world a very different place. When, through the light of the risen Jesus, we can honour, and be full of gratitude, for the ways in which God's light shines even now, the darkness that threatens us gives over to a radiant light, full of beauty, full of promise.

Let us therefore on the evening of Easter not simply hold a candle or gaze upon a candle. But let us rather become the candle upon which we gaze. In this way we will gift the world with a new possibility when the light of the world grows dim

Key Passage

"Early on the first day of the week, it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb."

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- In difficult situations, when have you been able to see a glimmer of light?
- Are there situations in your life where you are being called to be the light for another person?

WITNESSES OF MERCY

'In a world that is increasingly dehumanising and moving towards ruthlessness, violence and oppression, the Christian vocation is to witness to divine mercy, in collaboration with men and women of good will.

The seed of mercy is in all religions, and we are all responsible to germinate it in private and public life.

Then we will be witnesses of a better world, ruled by justice, peace, tenderness, love and mutual respect.

We invite all our faithful, who have any influence and power in the political, economic, cultural, social or family life to live mercy and make a culture that permeates the world that belongs to us.'

Extract (p.10) from 'Christ, the face of the Father's Mercy'. Pastoral Letter of His Beatitude Fouad Twal, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, on the occasion of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy. 1 October, 2015.

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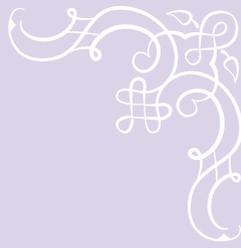


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