

# “It will be a Holy Year of Mercy” (Pope Francis)

## *A Reflection as the Year of Mercy opens*

*“The quality of mercy is not strained.*

*It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven upon the place beneath.*

*It is twice blessed: It blesseth him that gives, and him that takes. (...)*

*We do pray for mercy, and that same prayer*

*should teach us all to render the deeds of mercy.*

*[Portia: The Merchant of Venice: IV, 1, 181-84; 196-99]*

I doubt very much if there are many of us who do not have a need to forgive someone for something. Perhaps we have been the victim of an unkind word. Perhaps we have harboured resentment against someone for something which happened years ago, or yesterday, or last week. Perhaps there are aspects of our lives which we resent on a daily basis: having to clean up after someone else’s mess; having to put up with the ingratitude of another person for everything we try to do for them; having to pretend, on a regular basis, that everything is ok when, in reality, we feel like screaming; having to always be the one to pick up the pieces when the selfishness of another creates havoc in the home. Or perhaps, we have to forgive ourselves for losing our cool or criticising or being ungrateful or gossiping or condemning. Or maybe, just maybe, we would love to be free of all the restraints, all the

demands, all the expectations which others place on top of us – to be free to simply enjoy life, without having to worry about the needs and wants of others. The list goes on!

All of us have a feeling deep-down that things could be better. All of us have a sense, however vague, that we should not live in a world where a child dies of starvation every couple of seconds; where, at this very moment, yet another mother mourns the loss of her child; where there is such a wide gap between rich and poor; where people feel the need to seek escape through sex or drugs or the internet or alcohol or cynicism or suicide. We want justice. We want poverty and AIDS and addiction and violence to disappear – and rightly so! But how?!

Jesus, the merciful face of God, charts the way for us. The answer to all our questions, the soothing balm to calm all our fears, the reason for hope and perseverance, the source of peace and joy and justice and righteousness is Jesus. He is the First and the Last, the Living One, the One who was dead but now lives forever. He is the bringer of peace, the one who bears on His body the wounds of all our hurt and pain and misery and unbelief and the one who speaks a word of hope

into our darkened world: *'Peace be with you'* He says, *'As the Father sent me, so am I sending you.'* Sending us for what? With what? He is sending us as His messengers, with His word which helps us to become people for others – more concerned with my brother or sister's needs than with my own; more anxious to help out another person in pain than to wallow in my own problems and failures; more focused on proclaiming to others that, in the midst of darkness, the light of God's love and mercy shines forth brightly in our world.

The mercy of God means that we are not alone; that there is no darkness too black, no anxiety too painful, no resentment too deep, no despair too hopeless, no sin too grave, which cannot be renewed and changed so that we are strong enough to start again. Divine Mercy is boundless. It is as touch-button accessible as the Internet. There is no one and nothing that is beyond its reach. No situation, no sin, no unhappiness, no hurt, no resentment, no pain is beyond the reach of God's mercy. It is unending. God's passionate desire to forgive us, to redeem us, to renew us, to change us, to make us whole, is prevented by only one thing: our own lack of forgiveness towards ourselves and others in our lives.

God knows us exactly as we are – warts and all – and He wants us to be free of all the things which make us unhappy and which prevent us from receiving all that we need to be happy in this life and in the next. God stands before us with open arms, ready to lift us up and carry us on his shoulders to the only reality which means anything: the reality of His love and mercy towards us. We pray that His Mercy may deeply touch our lives so that we may be messengers of His peace in everything we do and say. We are His witnesses, His word, His action, His continuing presence in our world. We hear His word, we receive His body. We believe that He forgives us and we bring that forgiveness into every corner of our lives. With His help, we let go of bitterness, envy, pride, anger and lack of hope and we announce to a world which is sorely in need of good news that Jesus is alive, that He loves us and forgives us. He asks us to show the power of His mercy by the quality of our lives in which we show the same mercy to others that we ask for ourselves. Let us ask Him to make us God-like by bringing His mercy to others in our prayer, our actions and our attitudes. *"We do pray for mercy, and that same prayer should teach us all to render the deeds of mercy."* Amen.