

The Year of Mercy Thoughts for the Catechist

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"For His mercy endures forever." (Psalm 136)

*"He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord
require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly
with your God." (Micah 6:8).*



The Prodigal Son
Pompeo Batoni (1773)

I. INTRODUCTION

Pope Francis has proclaimed this year as a **Jubilee Year of Mercy**. This Jubilee year began on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception (December 8, 2015) and will end on the Feast of Christ the King (November 20, 2016). It is a great opportunity for us to grow in faith and grace.

Before discussing the **mercy of God**, let us consider what is meant by a “Jubilee Year.” The idea of a year of jubilee comes from the Old Testament. In the book of *Leviticus*, the chosen people were instructed to celebrate a **jubilee** every fifty years. It was a special year in which slaves and prisoners would be freed, debts would be forgiven and the mercies of God would be particularly manifest. Building on this tradition from the Old Covenant, the Church has, throughout her history, often celebrated a Jubilee year as a special year for the remission of sins and universal pardon. Such Jubilees have usually involved pilgrimage to a sacred site, frequently the city of Rome.

The most distinctive feature in the ceremonial of the Jubilee is the un-walling and the final walling up of the “holy door” at St. Peter’s basilica – and at the other three major basilicas in Rome (St. Mary Major, St. John Lateran, and St. Paul outside the Walls). The doors are opened by the Pope at the beginning of the Jubilee and then sealed up again at the conclusion. The Holy Door represents the passage to salvation, which was opened by Christ, our Lord. It also symbolizes an entryway to God’s mercy. Pope Francis wrote in *Misericordiae Vultus* (The Face of Mercy) which instituted this year of mercy,

“[Mercy] is the bridge that connects God and humanity, opening our hearts to the hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness.”

In a book written before the Holy Year of 2000, Virgilio Cardinal Noe, the late archpriest of St. Peter’s Basilica said,

“The door of a church marks the divide between the sacred and profane, separating the church's interior from the outside world. It is the boundary defining welcome and exclusion.”

The door represents Christ, Himself, as He said, “I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find Pasture.” (John 10: 9) I also represents Our Blessed Mother who is the dwelling place of the Lord.

For this Holy Year, Pope Francis has directed that every local church, at the **cathedral – the mother church of the faithful in that area** – a Door of Mercy be opened. Everywhere throughout the world there will be the opportunity for passing through the door. The indulgences for the Jubilee Year (which I will discuss later) are the same for those who travel to Rome and those who visit the holy door in other cathedrals or other designated Churches around the world. Bishop Loverde opened the Holy Door at our Cathedral of St. Thomas More on Sunday, December 13, 2015. Above the door there is now a reminder of its role. The sign reads, “Let us pass through this door and experience God’s abundant mercy.

As noted above, one aspect of a Holy Year is **pilgrimage**. To reach the Holy Door in Rome, or in our own dioceses, each of us, Pope Francis reminds us, will have to make such a journey. This pilgrimage should be seen as our journey towards conversion and our own way of participating in the Year of Mercy. I hope that all of you will have at least one chance this year to pass through the Holy Door. (I am blessed because the Cathedral is my parish and I am able to pass through the door every Sunday – and some other days as well!)

A second question as we begin is “What is mercy?” We are all familiar with the word. Perhaps one of Shakespeare’s most often quoted speeches is that from the *Merchant of Venice* (Act IV, Scene 1). These words of the poet present us with several truths about mercy:

*The quality of mercy is not strained;
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest;
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes:
'T is mightiest in the mightiest; it becomes
The throned monarch better than his crown:
His sceptre shows the force of temporal power,
The attribute to awe and majesty,
Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings;
But mercy is above this sceptred sway;
It is enthronèd in the hearts of kings,
It is an attribute to God himself;
And earthly power doth then show likest God's
When mercy seasons justice. Therefore, Jew,
Though justice be thy plea, consider this,
That, in the course of justice, none of us
Should see salvation: we do pray for mercy;
And that same prayer doth teach us all to render
The deeds of mercy. I have spoke thus much
To mitigate the justice of thy plea;
Which if thou follow, this strict court of Venice
Must needs give sentence 'gainst the merchant there.*

Saint Thomas Aquinas defined mercy in general as "the compassion in our hearts for another person's misery, a compassion which drives us to do what we can to help him." Similarly, Father Hardon, in his *Modern Catholic Dictionary*, says, “[Mercy is] the disposition to be kind and forgiving. Founded on compassion, mercy differs from compassion or the feeling of sympathy in putting this feeling into practice with a readiness to assist. It is therefore the ready willingness to help anyone in need, especially in need of pardon or reconciliation.”

Divine Mercy goes even further because there are no limits to God’s mercy. Mercy is essentially an expression of God’s love. Divine Mercy is the form that God's eternal love takes when he reaches out to us in the midst of our need and our brokenness. Whatever our misery might be — sin, guilt,

suffering, or death — He is always ready to pour out his merciful, compassionate love for us, to help in time of need.

In fact, God's love for His creatures always takes the form of merciful love. We read in the Psalms “All the ways of the Lord are mercy and truth,” (Psalm 25:10) and again, “His tender mercies are over all His works.” (Psalm 145:9) God's creation of the world, the Incarnation of the Son, the crucifixion, death and resurrection of His Son, the gift of the Holy Spirit — all of these are acts of God's mercy.

As I began to prepare for this talk, I realized how much the subject of **mercy** has been on my heart especially during the past year and a half. I have spent many hours reflecting on God's mercy and begging Him for it. Before going further in our discussion of the Year of Mercy, I hope you will bear with me as I share some very personal thoughts on mercy with you.

After 35 years of marriage my dear husband, Kevin, died on August 19th 2014. While he had suffered through several illnesses and survived, he sadly took his own life. He had suffered from severe manic-depression for over 25 years and had seen a once promising intellectual life slip away from him over time. In January of 2014 it became impossible for him to continue taking the medication that had helped for so long (due to the consequences on other organs.) He also had dealt with numerous other physical illnesses in the last 10 years. His depression grew deeper and darker during that last year and even three hospitalizations and ECT did not seem to help as they had previously. His doctor tried several different antidepressants (all of which, by the way, have as side effects suicidal thoughts or even suicide) and none of them seemed to help. Despite his suffering, his faith in God never wavered. But the darkness overwhelmed him and in a desperate moment he took his life. He had been to Confession only three days earlier; he had been praying 15 decades of the Rosary daily; he was in the midst of re-reading St. Francis de Sales' *Introduction to the Devout Life* in which I found the passage “Overcoming Great Temptations” marked; he was still wearing his medals — of St. Dominic, St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Dymphna (patron saint of those with mental illness); he had not lost his faith, but he just could not get out of the darkness of his depression.

My constant prayer since August 19, 2014 has been for MERCY. And I believe that Our Lord hears those prayers and will grant Kevin mercy, for as the psalmist says, “His mercy endures forever.” (Psalm 136) And I believe in God's mercy. How merciful is He for not only does He give us the grace of forgiveness, but He has given us the gift of Purgatory. Nothing could be more merciful than this.

I also believe that the Lord has shown me His mercy numerous times over the course of this past year and a half. The first instance, I think, was at Kevin's funeral Mass, when Father Rippey, not knowing of either my devotion to or my recent prayers to St. Therese of Lisieux, quoted her great promise of spending her heaven doing good upon earth. And this gift of Mercy was demonstrated even more as I made a novena to St. Therese before her feast day in October 2014 begging for mercy for Kevin. I received not one rose from her but roses upon roses, day after day through the whole novena — and not from anyone who might have known of my devotion or prayers — including an email from Pinterest with beautiful photographs of roses with the subject line “Roses — Just Because!” Another bouquet of roses was beautifully handmade from paper and graced the envelope of a sympathy card from the mother of one of my co-workers.

Right after Kevin's death, Father Gary Selin, a dear friend and graduate of Thomas Aquinas College, our *alma mater*, reminded me that the date of his death, August 19th, was the date of the August apparition of Our Lady of Fatima to the children, not the 13th of that month. (The children were prevented by the civil authorities from going to the Cova on the 13th, but Our Lady appeared to them on their first day back with the flocks – the 19th.) Father believed, as now do I, that the date of Kevin's death was a consolation to us from Our Lady, the mother of Mercy, and a sign that she was with her devoted son as He left this world.

On the night of Kevin's death, the detective who was in our home, told me that he too was a Catholic and would be praying for Kevin. The day after Kevin's funeral, he came to the house to return Kevin's rings, watch and medals. He told me that day about a fellow Catholic police officer who had committed suicide a few months earlier and I told him that I would pray for this officer. As he left he noticed the host of holy cards Kevin had placed above his dresser – many of saints who had companions (because Kevin was particularly devoted to these unnamed martyrs) – and commented to me that he had a great devotion to St. John Vianney. I was surprised that he spotted his card among all the others and thought it was nice that he told me. But at the same time I was puzzled. Why did I need to know this?

A few days later, while visiting my family in California, a memorial Mass was offered for Kevin at Thomas Aquinas College, our *alma mater*. The chaplain who offered the Mass was a dear friend from our college days. In his homily he recounted a story about the Curé of Ars. A woman whose husband had been away from the Church and had committed suicide by jumping from a bridge, came to see him. St. John Vianney exclaimed through the crowd, "He is saved!" The woman was incredulous so the saint repeated, stressing each word, "I tell you he is saved. He is in Purgatory, and you must pray for him. Between the parapet of the bridge and the water he had time to make an act of contrition."

These words of the great saint not only brought me great consolation, but I knew upon hearing them that I needed to tell the detective. Suddenly, it all made sense. Kevin's holy cards prompted the detective to tell me of his devotion and then Father's account of the saint explained why I needed to know this. When I returned home, I shared the story with the detective. He did not know the story and was greatly comforted by it. He too was struck by the workings of Providence.

These manifestations of Divine Providence have continued in many other ways as I have prayed for mercy for Kevin. While cleaning out some of the mountain of papers in his study, I found a carol that Kevin had written for the feast of Epiphany which I had never seen. Kevin was strongly devoted to this feast and Sts. Balthasar, Gaspar and Melchior. In his carol, his love for Our Lord and Our Blessed Mother leapt off the page and I had to believe that Our Lord would show mercy to him.

A dear friend, who is a Carmelite monk at Immaculate Heart Hermitage in Big Sur California, knows a holy woman who frequents the hermitage and who prays continually for the souls in purgatory. She often, in fact, has visions of various souls. Father told her about Kevin and his death and asked her to pray for him. Sometime later she wrote to Father Isaiah the following:

"Kevin is hammering white rock with a silver colored hammer. His face is serene. He is down on one knee. He is looking towards heaven. He is doing what he needs to do to get there. Thanks be to God."

What a tremendous gift it has been to read and re-read these words. As I have prayed for Kevin, this image of him has remained in the forefront of my mind's eye. But that is not the end of that story...

As Californians, both Kevin and I were long devoted to Father Serra and the Missions. I grew up just four blocks from Junipero Serra Boulevard in San Francisco and Kevin attended Junipero Serra High School in Los Angeles for a year. Interestingly, the first thing I bought for Kevin after our engagement was a four volume set of the writings of Father Serra which we found at Carmel Mission. We attended Mass the day after our wedding at Carmel Mission where St. Junipero is buried. The second part of our honeymoon was spent in Santa Barbara the site of another Mission.

During August I decided to read a biography of Father Serra in preparation for his canonization. After learning that Father Serra had known three individuals who had committed suicide, beginning on August 19th, the anniversary of my husband's death, I began praying to then Blessed Junipero Serra for him. After about two weeks, I began asking Father Serra to intercede with Our Blessed Lord and to bring Kevin to heaven on the day of his canonization.

Unbeknownst to me, our friend Father Isaiah, the Camoldolese monk from California, was praying for the same thing. And Father was privileged to be a concelebrant at the Mass of canonization.

During our visit the day after the canonization, Father told me that he had heard from the woman who had the vision of Kevin in purgatory last year. She did not know that Father was planning to visit me and Kevin's grave. She told him that she had another vision of Kevin. She said:

“He has completed the statue he was carving (the white stone he was carving with the silver hammer); it was a beautiful statue of Our Lady of Grace (with her arms outstretched, radiating the grace of God). Kevin was standing with the completed statue, smiling, looking toward heaven and waiting. It would seem that his work in purgatory is done.”

And still the story doesn't end. In November I heard from Father Isaiah yet again....He received another note from his visionary. This time Kevin spoke to her! She wrote:

“Kevin asked me to tell you [Father Isaiah], ‘Thank you for visiting Martha.’ He also wanted you and Martha to know, ‘God told me that what I did during my life far outshone the way I ended my life.’”

Both statements ring so very true. Throughout our marriage one thing I always recognized about Kevin was his gratitude to others. And even in his illnesses he was always concerned about me. I pray that he is now with God for eternity – and praying for all of us. I will never stop praying for him, but this seems to be just one more sign of the mercy of God. What tremendous graces I have been given.

And I still have a couple of more things to share; the little signs of mercy just keep happening! On the date of our wedding anniversary in 2015, after attending Mass, I had planned to take a drive somewhere, but suddenly was inspired to go to the National Gallery of Art. You may not know how much I love art, particularly using religious art as a catechetical tool, but I do! And Kevin did too. We frequently went to the Gallery or other museums on the weekends. So, on our anniversary I went. What I did not know until I got there, was that a special exhibit had been there since March

and was ending five days later. The exhibit was titled, “Peter Paul Rubens: The Three Magi Reunited” – three **portraits** (not a painting of the Nativity with the Magi, but just their portraits) of the Magi which had not been shown together for over 130 years. I could only believe that the inspiration to go was truly Divine Inspiration and a gift. The portraits were magnificent, but even more; they were something which Kevin would have loved seeing. And I believe that this was another mercy given to me by our Lord.

Kevin was a stickler for celebrating the feast of Epiphany on the actual 12th day of Christmas – January 6th. Over the years the celebration became more and more elaborate as we blessed our home, recited psalms and sang carols for the feast. He wrote an original story (*The First Twelfthnight*) and a carol for the feast. This year I took the day off from work as I would always do. Midday I received a call from a woman in Arlington inquiring about the Leonine Institute for Advanced Catholic Studies (which was a program Kevin set up to provide one-on-one tutoring in philosophy, theology, Latin – and almost anything else – for adults). She had found it listed in the Diocesan Directory after watching the Pope’s Mass in Rome for the feast. I explained to her that sadly that project had died with Kevin. She told me that she would offer her Rosary and her Divine Mercy chaplet that day for Kevin. I told her how grateful I was and how much it meant to me. I also told her just how important this feast was to Kevin and therefore how significant it was to pray for him especially that day. She said to me, “I guess I was meant to call you today.” My response was, “I guess you were! God is good.”

As I said earlier, I will never stop praying for Kevin and asking God for mercy towards him, but I believe that mercy has been granted. This is our faith.

With that introduction, let us now discuss the Year of Mercy as proclaimed by Pope Francis!

II. THE PROCLAMATION OF THE YEAR OF MERCY – *Misericordiae Vultus*

On Divine Mercy Sunday Pope Francis announced the Jubilee of Mercy in his papal bull entitled *Misericordiae Vultus* (literally, the face of mercy). The bull begins by reminding us that “Jesus Christ is the face of the Father’s mercy.” Quoting from the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (*Dei Verbum*) from the Second Vatican Council, the Pope says, “Jesus of Nazareth, by His words, His actions and His entire person, reveals the mercy of God.”

He further quotes St. Thomas Aquinas who said, “It is proper to God to exercise mercy, and He manifests His omnipotence particularly in this way.” Mercy, despite what the world might think, is never a sign of weakness but of power. And in the Liturgy, specifically in the collect for the 26th Sunday of Ordinary Time (September 27th this year), the Church echoes these words:

“O God, who manifest your almighty power above all by pardoning and showing mercy, bestow, we pray, your grace abundantly upon us and make those hastening to attain your promises heirs to the treasures of heaven. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.”

Not only is God merciful but He waits patiently for us to come to Him and ask for His mercy. Throughout the Old Testament we hear of God’s **patient** mercy. At the same time we hear of God’s justice. The people do not **deserve** this mercy. We know that the correlative of mercy is justice.

And we know that not only is God all merciful, but He is also all just. Justice would demand that those who sin be treated accordingly by God, but mercy...mercy is that which allows us to know that **with repentance** we can be forgiven. Mercy will be always be greater than any sin we might commit. And the mercy shown by God to the chosen people time and time again in the Old Testament reminds us of this.

St. Thomas argues that in God's nature, Divine Mercy and Divine Justice actually coincide: they are one in the simplicity of God's essence. God is always and everywhere just **and** merciful, at one and the same time. When God acts mercifully, He does not act against justice, but goes beyond it. Furthermore, even divine punishment, St. Thomas claims, is a work of mercy as well as of justice, because God rewards the righteous and penitent far beyond their merits, and punishes the impenitent far less than they deserve.

Similarly, in her autobiography, *The Story of a Soul*, St. Thérèse of Lisieux, says:

“To me (God) has granted His infinite Mercy, and through it, I contemplate and adore the other divine perfections! All of these perfections appear to be resplendent with love; even His Justice (and perhaps this even more so than the others) seems to me clothed in love. What a sweet joy it is to think that God is Just, i.e., that He takes into account our weakness, that He is perfectly aware of our fragile nature. What should I fear then?”

God only asks that we acknowledge our sin and turn back to Him. This patient mercy of God is frequently seen in the words of the psalms. As the psalmist says, “He forgives all your iniquity, He heals all your diseases, He redeems your life from the pit, He crowns you with steadfast love and mercy.” (Psalm 103: 3-4)

This mercy is particularly evident in Psalm 136 where the psalmist narrates the history of salvation, the history of the constant failures and sins of the chosen people. After each verse, the refrain is sung, “For His mercy endures forever.” This psalm should be our constant reminder. God is all merciful and His mercy endures forever.

Pope Francis exhorts us in his proclamation to remember that Mercy is the very foundation of the life of the Church. “The Church has an endless desire to show mercy.” He reminds us that our world needs mercy by quoting from the encyclical of St. John Paul II, *Dives in Misericordiae*,

“The present-day mentality, more perhaps than that of people in the past, seems opposed to a God of mercy, and in fact tends to exclude from life and to remove from the human heart the very idea of mercy. The word and the concept of ‘mercy’ seem to cause uneasiness in man, who, thanks to the enormous development of science and technology, never before known in history, has become the master of the earth and has subdued and dominated it (cf. Gen 1:28). This dominion over the earth, sometimes understood in a one-sided and superficial way, seems to have no room for mercy... And this is why, in the situation of the Church and the world today, many individuals and groups guided by a lively sense of faith are turning, I would say almost spontaneously, to the mercy of God....”

The mystery of Christ... obliges me to proclaim mercy as God's merciful love, revealed in that same mystery of Christ. It likewise obliges me to have recourse to that mercy and to beg for it at this difficult, critical phase of the history of the Church and of the world...."

"The Church lives an authentic life when she professes and proclaims mercy – the most stupendous attribute of the Creator and of the Redeemer – and when she brings people close to the sources of the Saviour's mercy, of which she is the trustee and dispenser..."

Most importantly, the Pope directs the Church to live this Jubilee Year in light of the Lord's words to His disciples, "Be merciful just as your Father is merciful." (Lk. 6: 36)

III. MERCY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Pope Francis teaches that Divine Mercy is strong theme in the Old Testament. God forgives the Israelites time and time again, showing them mercy despite their frequent turning against him.

The theme of Divine Mercy particularly echoes in the book of Psalms. First of all, there are Psalms devoted to the praise of Divine Mercy. Psalm 136, as we have already noted, for example, recounts all the merciful deeds of the Lord in creation, in rescuing Israel from slavery and in bringing the Chosen People to the Promised Land. It is this psalm which repeats the refrain "For His mercy endures forever" after each verse. Psalm 106 and 107 each summarize proofs of the mercy of the Lord in leading Israel out of Egypt and into the Promised Land. Psalm 106 begins: "Praise the Lord! O give thanks to the Lord for He is good; for his steadfast mercy endures forever." Psalm 107 gives thanks to the Lord for all of the many ways he delivers people from trouble and danger.

Several of the psalms define the very nature of God chiefly in terms of His merciful love. Psalm 145, for example, repeats and elaborates upon God's self-designation as the merciful one from Exodus (verse 8): "The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. The Lord is good to all, and His compassion is over all His works." Psalm 103 is perhaps the most comprehensive exposition of the many faceted mercy of God: He forgives, He heals, He is dependable, He provides for His people, He is compassionate toward human weakness; He is patient; and He is forbearing.

**Bless the LORD, my soul; all my being, bless His holy name!
Bless the LORD, my soul; and do not forget all His gifts,
Who pardons all your sins, and heals all your ills,
Who redeems your life from the pit, and crowns you with mercy and compassion,
Who fills your days with good things, so your youth is renewed like the eagle's.
The LORD does righteous deeds, brings justice to all the oppressed.
He made known His ways to Moses, to the Israelites his deeds.
Merciful and gracious is the LORD, slow to anger, abounding in mercy.
He will not always accuse, and nurses no lasting anger;
He has not dealt with us as our sins merit, nor requited us as our wrongs deserve.**

For as the heavens tower over the earth, so His mercy towers over those who fear Him.

As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our sins from us.

As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him.

For He knows how we are formed, remembers that we are dust.

As for man, his days are like the grass; he blossoms like a flower in the field.

A wind sweeps over it and it is gone; its place knows it no more.

But the LORD's mercy is from age to age, toward those who fear Him.

His salvation is for the children's children of those who keep His covenant, and remember to carry out his precepts. (Psalm 103:1-20)

The Psalms also tell us how to look for the mercy of the Lord. Psalms 112:4 states: "Light rises in darkness for the upright; the Lord is gracious, merciful and just." In other words, we can only see God's mercy clearly when we are upright ourselves: a merciless and unjust heart cannot see nor experience nor understand the mercy of the Lord. Psalm 111 reminds us that it is through remembering His "wonderful works" that we can best appreciate the Divine Mercy, for His mercy is no mere philosophical abstraction; it is proven in His deeds.

Many of the Psalms focus on the boundless extent of God's mercy. Psalm 57, for example, tells us of the greatness of Divine Mercy (verse 11): "For Thy steadfast love is great to the heavens, Thy faithfulness to the clouds." Psalm 33:5 states: "the earth is full of the steadfast love of the Lord." Psalm 23 tells us that the tender care of the Lord is like that of a shepherd for his flock, and that He leads us to His eternal home (verse 6): "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

Other Psalms also encourage us to place our trust in the Lord, and to hope in Him. Psalm 32:10 promises: "Many are the pangs of the wicked, but steadfast mercy surrounds him who trusts in the Lord." Psalm 33:18 makes a similar promise: "Behold, the eye of the Lord is upon those who fear Him, on those who hope in His steadfast love [mercy]." Perhaps no Psalm says it better than Psalm 130, which is a cry for forgiveness from a soul cast deep into the darkness by trouble and sin:

Out of the depths I call to you, Lord; Lord, hear my cry!

May your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy.

If you, Lord, keep account of sins, Lord, who can stand?

But with you is forgiveness and so you are revered.

I wait for the Lord, my soul waits and I hope for His word.

My soul looks for the Lord more than sentinels for daybreak.

More than sentinels for daybreak, let Israel hope in the LORD,

For with the Lord is mercy, with Him is plenteous redemption,

And He will redeem Israel from all its sins.

The Psalms are perhaps the most beautiful prayers we can say. The Church recognizes their importance such that she recites them daily in the Divine Office. It is good for them to become our prayers as well. If you are not already in the habit of praying the Office, I would encourage you to do so. At different times in my life I have been in the habit of saying at least one of the hours, usually Compline (Night Prayer). But this past year, I made it my Lenten practice to say Morning Prayer, the

Office of Readings and Night Prayer. And now I am trying to say Vespers as well. It was amazing how taking these few minutes every day brought such comfort and peace. The Psalms become like a tapestry in the background of one's life or like the perfumed air after a summer storm. It is a wonderful way of praying with the Church and of praying throughout the day. As you pray the Office, you will see the great beauty of the Psalms and these prayers will become yours.

In the words of the prophets, too, we see proclamations of Divine Mercy. First, there is the promise that God's mercy will be showered not only upon the Israelites, but one day upon all the Gentile nations. Secondly, the People of Israel are encouraged not only to believe in Divine Mercy and to call upon the Lord, but also to be merciful, that is, to live mercifully.

The prophet Isaiah teaches the Israelites that they must wait patiently for God's mercy to manifest itself, even as He has waited patiently for their conversion (38:10): "Therefore the Lord waits to be gracious to you; therefore He exalts Himself to show mercy to you. For the Lord is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for him."

When the Lord does pour out His mercy upon Israel, He will do so in abundance (40: 29-31):

**He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might He increases strength.
Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted.
But they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength.
They shall run and not be weary.
They shall walk and not faint.**

Isaiah also prophesies the coming of the Suffering Servant of the Lord, the Messiah, who will obtain mercy for all by his sufferings (Is 53: 3-6). Through the work of the Messiah, Israel will fulfil the full scope of her vocation, to bring the salvation of the Lord to all the Gentile nations. In Isaiah 49:6, the Lord says: "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth." This promise of salvation to all nations exhibits the great Mercy of God.

The theme of Divine Mercy recurs in the other prophets too. In Jeremiah, for example, we hear the words of the Lord as He promised the joyful return of Israel from exile (31:3): "I have loved you with an everlasting love, therefore I have continued my mercy to you." In other words, God's love is the root of His mercy; because He loves, He is merciful to Israel.

The prophet Joel repeats the refrain about the Lord's mercy, a passage which we just heard, as we do every year, on Ash Wednesday.

**Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart,
With fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;
And rend your hearts and not your garments.
Return to the Lord your God,
For He is gracious and merciful,
Slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love ... (Joel 2:12-13)**

The prophet Jonah speaks in a similar manner.

I pray thee, Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country. That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that Thou art a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love ... (Jonah 4:2)

Indeed, throughout the entire history of Israel, and especially in the era of the prophets, at every major event or crisis point, it was the mercy of the Lord that the Israelites remembered, and on the basis of which they made their prayerful appeals. For example, the opening line of the prayer of King Solomon at the moment of the dedication of the Great Temple in Jerusalem (I Kings 8:23) declares, "Lord, God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth below; you keep covenant and mercy toward your servants who walk before you with their whole heart..."

The Jews cried for mercy when they were languishing in exile in Babylon (Bar 2:11-3:8): "Hear, O Lord, and have mercy, for we have sinned before Thee. For Thou art enthroned forever, and we are perishing forever." The elderly Tobit also exalted God's mercy, in expectation of His blessings upon His scattered people (Tobit 13:4-5):

"Make His greatness known there [before all nations], and exalt Him in the presence of all the living; because He is our Lord and God, He is our Father forever. He will afflict us for our iniquities; and again He will show mercy, and will gather us from all the nations among whom you have been scattered."

Finally, here are the words of the renewal of Israel's covenant with God after the return of the Jews from exile to the Holy Land (Neh 9:31): "Nevertheless, in Thy great mercies Thou didst not make an end of them nor forsake them; for Thou art a gracious and merciful God."

We can sum up the message of Divine Mercy in the Old Testament with the words of Pope John Paul II from his encyclical *Dives in Misericordia* (section 4):

Thus, in deeds and in words the Lord revealed His mercy from the beginnings of the people which He chose for Himself; and in the course of its history, this people continually entrusted itself, both when stricken with misfortune and when it became aware of its sin, to the God of mercies....

The Old Testament encourages people suffering from misfortune, especially those weighed down by sin — as also the whole of Israel, which had entered into covenant with God — to *appeal for mercy*, and enables them to count upon it: it reminds them of His mercy in times of failure and loss of trust. Subsequently, the Old Testament gives *thanks and glory* for mercy every time that mercy is made manifest in the life of the people or in the lives of individuals... Thus, it is easy to understand why the psalmists, when they desire to sing the highest praises of the Lord, break forth into hymns to the God of love, tenderness, mercy, and fidelity...

IV. MERCY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The New Testament shows us even more about God's mercy. Jesus shows us the face of the Father's mercy time and time again — in His actions and in His parables. Before reflecting on the parables, let us look briefly first at several Gospel scene where we see Our Lord exercise mercy.

After the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus saw that the crowds following him were exhausted and tired. St. Matthew tells us that he felt deep compassion (mercy) for them. (Mt. 9:36). In the Gospel of St. Luke we are told that Jesus raised the widow's son from the dead because he was moved by compassion for her. (Lk. 7:15) St. Mark tells us that after driving out the demons from the young man, Our Lord told him "Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." (Mk. 5:19) In St. John's Gospel we read the beautiful story of the woman who had been caught in adultery. He did not condemn her. Rather he forgave her and His final words to her were a clear demonstration of His mercy – "Go, and sin no more." (Jn. 8:11). As Our Lord left the city of Jericho, two blind men called out to Him, "Have mercy on us, Son of David..." and Jesus had mercy and cured them. (Mt. 20: 34) St. Luke recounts two of Our Lord's last Words. Both are words of mercy. On the cross, Our Lord showed His mercy both to the penitent thief, St. Dismas (Lk.23: 42) and to those who crucified Him when He said, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." (Lk. 23: 34) While instructing His disciples, Our Lord reminds them, "'Be merciful, as your Father is merciful'" (Lk 6:36). After Peter denied knowing Our Lord in the courtyard of the high priest, St. Luke records: **"and the Lord turned and looked at Peter;** and Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, "Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times." **He went out and began to weep bitterly."** (Luke 22: 61-62) From the description, and remembering the opening words of Pope Francis' announcement, one can surmise that Our Lord looked at Peter with mercy (Jesus being the face of Mercy). Undoubtedly, it was this that caused Peter such remorse and sorrow. And when Our Lord called the tax collector, Matthew, He looked on him with mercy, a scene so beautifully portrayed below by Caravaggio. (Mt. 9: 9-13)



The whole Gospel of St. Luke is sometimes called the "The Gospel of Mercy." The theme of God's merciful love runs through the entire Gospel. The Gospel contains a cluster of parables in chapter 15 which are unique to St. Luke's Gospel and which especially highlight the merciful love of God.

St. Luke places special emphasis on the universal scope of Divine Mercy, portraying it as a distinctive characteristic of the Kingdom of God dawning upon the world through Jesus Christ. In chapter three, for example, he quotes Isaiah 40:3-5 as a prophecy about the coming of John the Baptist ("the voice of one crying in the wilderness"), but unlike St. Matthew (who quotes the same prophecy), Luke quotes its final line: "And all flesh [that is, all humanity] shall see the salvation of God."

Saint Luke also traces his genealogy of Jesus in chapter three not just back to Abraham — the father of the Jewish nation according to the Bible — as St. Matthew had done, but all the way back to Adam, the father of all mankind. Luke ends his genealogy with the words, "the son of Adam, the son of God," thereby identifying God as Adam's father. In short, Luke seems to be saying that all descendants of Adam are children of God, and this is another sign that Jesus' saving mission is intended to be universal in scope.

Another way that St. Luke emphasizes this theme is by including in his gospel stories of how Jesus reached out to all kinds of people, of every gender, class, race, and moral character.

The Gospel of St. Luke, begins with the harmony of two great canticles which praise the Mercy of God – the ***Magnificat***, the prayer of Our Lady upon entering the house of Elizabeth and Zechariah, and the ***Benedictus*** or Canticle of Zechariah, the prayer of praise recited by Zechariah upon the birth of his son, John the Baptist. These two canticles are so important that the Church recites them daily in Her Divine Office – the Canticle of Zechariah at Morning Prayer and the Magnificat at Evening Prayer (Vespers). It is good to read them, reflect on them, and pray them daily even if we cannot say the whole Office.

<i>BENEDICTUS</i>	<i>MAGNIFICAT</i>
<p>Blessed be the Lord, The God of Israel; He has come to His people and set them free. He has raised up for us a mighty Saviour, Born of the house of His servant David. Through His holy prophets He promised of old That He would save us from our enemies, From the hands of all who hate us. He promised to show mercy to our fathers And to remember His holy Covenant. This was the oath He swore to our father Abraham: To set us free from the hands of our enemies, Free to worship Him without fear, Holy and righteous in His sight All the days of our life. You, My child shall be called The prophet of the Most High, For you will go before the Lord to prepare His way, To give his people knowledge of salvation By the forgiveness of their sins. In the tender compassion of our Lord The dawn from on high shall break upon us, to shine on those who dwell in darkness And the shadow of death, And to guide our feet into the way of peace.</p>	<p>My soul magnifies the Lord And my spirit rejoices in God my Savior; Because He has regarded the lowliness of His handmaid; For behold, henceforth all generations shall call me blessed; Because He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name; And His mercy is from generation to generation on those who fear Him. He has shown might with His arm, He has scattered the proud in the conceit of their heart. He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and has exalted the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty. He has given help to Israel, his servant, mindful of His mercy Even as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his posterity forever.</p>

It is also St. Luke who describes the beginning of Our Lord's ministry with the scene in the synagogue of Nazareth, where Our Lord reads the words of Isaiah referring to the a Jubilee Year, in fact, a year of mercy.

And Jesus came to Nazareth, where he had grown up, and went according to His custom into the synagogue on the Sabbath day. He stood up to read and was

handed a scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the passage where it was written, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord." Rolling up the scroll, he handed it back to the attendant, and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue looked intently at Him. He said to them, "Today this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing" (Lk 4:16-21).

Let us look now at Luke 15 where we find three parables not recorded in any of the other Gospels, three parables which uniquely show the Mercy of God. These are the Parable of the Lost Coin, the Parable of the Lost Sheep and the Parable of the Prodigal Son (sometimes called the "The Parable of the Loving Father.") In all three parables, what is "lost" is the sinner, because of his sins, and the one who finds him is the merciful Savior, God. These parables show us not only that God welcomes back the sinner and forgives him, but that He will also go out in search of the sinner. A second theme common to all three parables is the great joy which God manifests whenever He is able to rescue lost sinners and bring them home.

I want to focus particularly on the third of these parables, the Parable of the Prodigal Son. Let us listen to the parable first:

"A man had two sons, and the younger son said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of your estate that should come to me.' So the father divided the property between them. After a few days, the younger son collected all his belongings and set off to a distant country where he squandered his inheritance on a life of dissipation.

When he had freely spent everything, a severe famine struck that country, and he found himself in dire need. So he hired himself out to one of the local citizens who sent him to his farm to tend the swine. And he longed to eat his fill of the pods on which the swine fed, but nobody gave him any. Coming to his senses he thought, 'How many of my father's hired workers have more than enough food to eat, but here am I, dying from hunger. I shall get up and go to my father and I shall say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as you would treat one of your hired workers."' So he got up and went back to his father.

While he was still a long way off, his father caught sight of him, and was filled with compassion. He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him. His son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son.' But his father ordered his servants, 'Quickly bring the finest robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Take the fattened calf and slaughter it. Then let us celebrate with a feast, because this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found.' Then the celebration began.

Now the older son had been out in the field and, on his way back, as he neared the house, he heard the sound of music and dancing. He called one of the

servants and asked what this might mean. The servant said to him, ‘Your brother has returned and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’ He became angry, and when he refused to enter the house, his father came out and pleaded with him. He said to his father in reply, ‘Look, all these years I served you and not once did I disobey your orders; yet you never gave me even a young goat to feast on with my friends. But when your son returns who swallowed up your property with prostitutes, for him you slaughter the fattened calf.’ He said to him, ‘My son, you are here with me always; everything I have is yours. But now we must celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.’”

Above I noted that the Parable of the Prodigal Son has sometimes been called the Parable of the Loving Father. Both titles show us mercy – but from two viewpoints. In the first, we focus on the repentance of the son, which is the necessary prerequisite for the father’s forgiveness. The second title focuses on the love of the father which goes beyond forgiveness to restoration of his son to his rightful place in the family. Pope Benedict XVI in his book, *Jesus of Nazareth*, proposes a third title – “The Parable of the Two Sons.” I will come back to his comments in a few minutes.

The parable begins with the son asking for his inheritance. He wants live as if his father were dead; he wants to turn his back on him and yet receive what he would have received upon his father’s death. He wants independence from his father. He wants freedom without limits. He wants to live his life only for himself not subject to any commandments or authority. He is like us in that we want the good things from God, but so often want to live our lives without thinking of Him.

The father did not argue with his son; it is as if he knew that it would make no difference. As God gives us free will, the father gave his son his inheritance. And as we so frequently misuse our free will, so the son took his inheritance, went to a far country (as far as possible, it seems) and spent it all. St. Augustine, in his commentary on the parable, says that the “far country” represents our forgetfulness of God.

While the son was in that country, a famine arose in the land and he had to take a job herding and feeding pigs. (For a Jew, this must have doubly hard.) Instead of indulging his pleasures, he ends up a slave. He is hungry. His belly is empty. But even the food of the pigs could not satisfy his hunger. We are reminded of St. Augustine’s words from his *Confessions*, “Thou has made us for thyself, and our souls are restless until they find their rest in thee.” We are also reminded that sin frequently brings suffering.

And then the son realized what he had done. His eyes were opened. He wanted to return to his father. He wanted to go home. He wanted to return to his family. He hoped that his loving father would welcome him back. Similarly, since we became God’s sons and daughters when we were baptized, we are members of His family – always. Even as sinners, we can return to God and ask for forgiveness just as the son did. St. Augustine, in his *Confessions*, described this turning from self to God eloquently and we can imagine these same words on the lips of the prodigal son.

**Late have I loved you, O Beauty ever ancient, ever new, late have I loved you!
You were within me, but I was outside, and it was there that I searched for you.**

In my unloveliness I plunged into the lovely things which you created. You were with me, but I was not with you. Created things kept me from you; yet if they had not been in you they would not have been at all.

You called, you shouted, and you broke through my deafness. You flashed, you shone, and you dispelled my blindness. You breathed your fragrance on me; I drew in breath and now I pant for you. I have tasted you, now I hunger and thirst for more. You touched me, and I burned for your peace.

The son prepares his speech to his father. He knows he has sinned and he does not expect to be restored to his place in the family. He hopes merely to be allowed to be a servant in his father's house. He realizes that he no longer deserves to be treated as a son, and is willing to accept the humiliation and shame of being a servant in his father's home. He echoes the words of the psalmist, "Against you, O God, you alone have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight." (Ps. 51: 4) He has taken the first step; he has acknowledged his sin and expressed his sorrow about his actions.

If we were to look at this with the eyes of justice, it would seem **just** that the son earn his living in his father's house. He has wasted the property he received from his father and even more, he has hurt and offended his father in the process. In his eyes and our human eyes, he has deprived himself of his dignity as a son.

What he does not expect is the reaction of his father. His father has been watching and waiting for his coming. The son could not have imagined that his father would be waiting for him. Yet God is waiting for us too. Just as the father ran out to embrace his son, God waits and embraces us at the first turning of our hearts to Him. The son received his father's mercy before he could even speak his words of repentance. His father knew that his return could only represent repentance. This is a sign of the true mercy of God.

But then his father does even more. He orders a celebration in thanksgiving for the return of his son. One imagines that this reaction made the son even more penitent. Just as the forgiveness of God makes us despise our sins all the more. The son is dressed in an elaborate robe, a ring placed on his finger, shoes placed on his feet and he is invited to partake of the fatted calf.

Many of the early Church Fathers (Sts. Ambrose, Jerome, Basil and St. Augustine) taught that this parable illuminates the sacramental nature of the Church. St. Augustine sees each of these as symbols of our life in the Church – the cloak is the cloak of grace, the ring represents the hope of salvation, the shoes on his feet will allow him to understand his past life. Finally, he is invited to the supper, the Eucharistic banquet, which will sate his appetite forever.

Finally, we see in this parable the reaction of the older son. He complains to his father that he has been faithful and yet he has not received such a celebration. His father must remind him that "all that is mine is yours." He has always had the love and mercy of his father. Pope Benedict describes the elder son:

"The older brother now makes his appearance. He comes home from working in the fields, hears feasting at home, finds out why and becomes angry. He finds it simply unfair that this good-for-nothing, who has squandered his entire fortune – the father's property – with prostitutes, should now be given a

splendid feast straightaway without any period of probation, without any time of penance. That contradicts his sense of justice: The life he has spent working is made to look of no account in comparison to the dissolute past of the other. Bitterness arises in him: ‘Lo, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed one of your commands,’ he says to his father, ‘yet you never gave me a kid that I might make merry with my friends’ (Lk. 15: 29). The father goes out to meet the older brother, too, and now he speaks kindly to his son. The older brother knows nothing of the inner transformations and wanderings experienced by the younger brother, of his journey into distant parts, of his fall and his new self-discovery. He sees only injustice. And this betrays the fact that he too had secretly dreamed of a freedom without limits, that his obedience has made him inwardly bitter, and that he has no awareness of the grace of being at home, of the true freedom he enjoys as a son. ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours’ (Lk. 15: 31). The father explains to him the great value of sonship with these words...” (Pope Benedict XVI, Jesus of Nazareth, pp. 208-209)

This parable has inspired more artists than any of Our Lord’s other parables in Scripture. Numerous artists have depicted different scenes from the parable – the son receiving his inheritance; the son living in debauchery in the distant land; the son having lost everything and living as a slave feeding the pigs; the son returning home and receiving the embrace of his father. This scene is depicted by Rembrandt, Tissot and Batoni (see next page). The painting by the Spanish artist, Murillo, shows a whole scene. The fatted calf is being brought into the courtyard, the clothes and shoes are ready to be given to the son, and the son appears to be begging forgiveness from his father. Murillo has captured all of the symbolism noted by St. Augustine.



The Return of the Prodigal Son
Bartolome Esteban Murillo (1667)



Rembrandt (1662-1669)

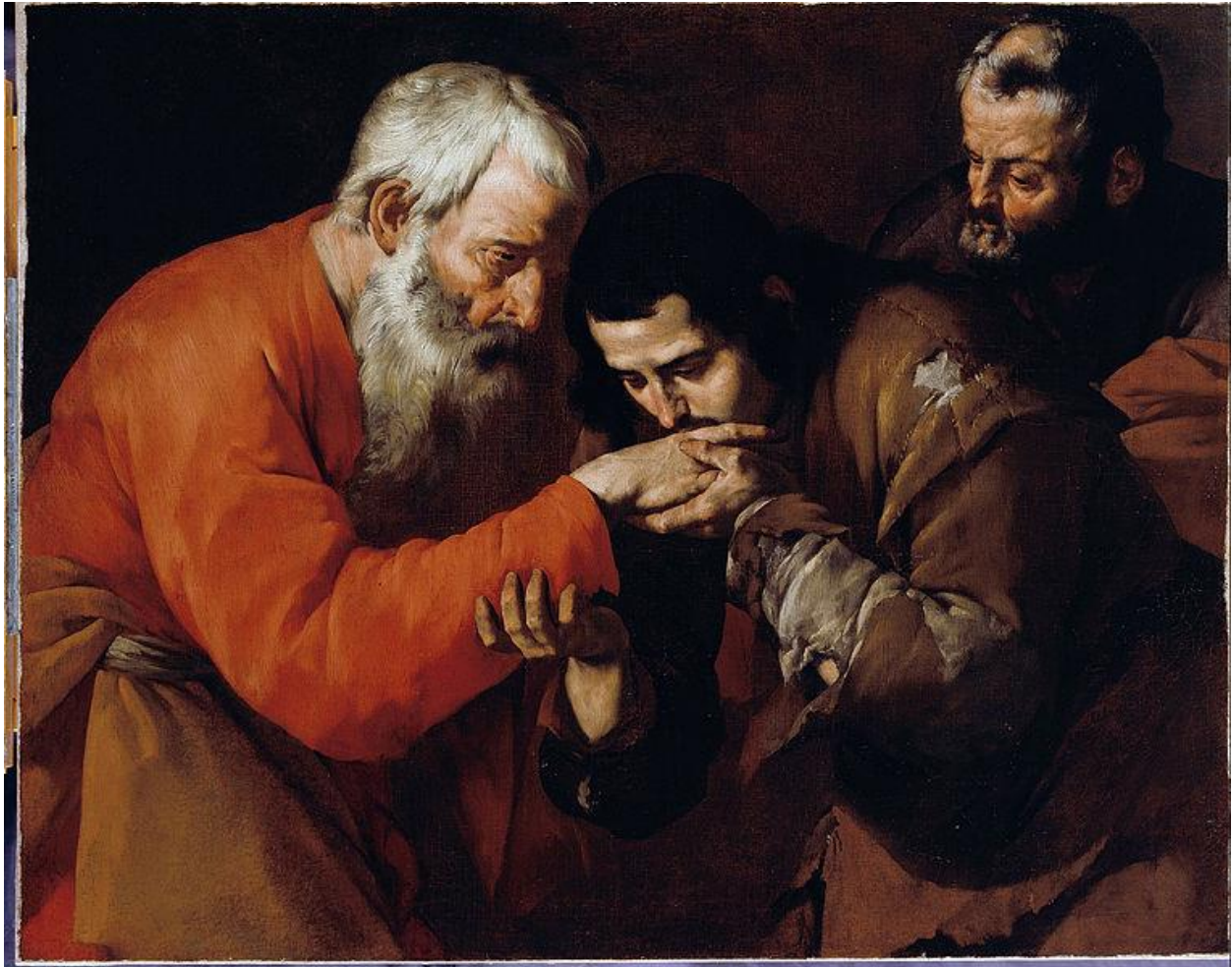


Tissot (1880)



Batoni (1773)

A fourth painting by an unnamed artist of the 17th century beautifully depicts the repentance of the son as he kisses his father's hand as his older brother looks over his shoulder. The compassion in the father's face is particularly striking.



V. WHAT CAN WE DO?

What now do we do? How do we make the Year of Mercy a reality for us and our students?

I would suggest that we begin with the Sacrament of Reconciliation – the great sacrament of Mercy. Here in our diocese we are fortunate to have opportunities for Confession all around us. Let us encourage our students to make use of this great gift. We want them to see the sacrament as a chance to grow closer to God not something to be feared. It is the sacrament of Mercy. How blessed are we that we have this opportunity to **know** our sins are forgiven.

Pope Francis has indicated the importance of the Sacrament by two significant acts. He has extended the power to forgive the sin of abortion (which is distinct from the canonical crime of abortion) to all priests throughout the world. As our own Bishop Loverde remarked last fall:

“Within the Diocese of Arlington, both my predecessor Bishop Keating and I have given our priests the ability to forgive the sin of abortion. I also want to reassure those who have already celebrated the sacrament of Penance that their sins, including the sin of abortion, confessed with a contrite heart are

forgiven forever. Let us rejoice with all who experience the mercy and peace of God through the forgiveness of sins in the sacrament of Penance!”

The Pope has also announced that all those who go to Confession to priests in the Society of St. Pius X (which is not in union with Rome presently), will receive valid absolution. In other words, the Pope is doing everything possible to ensure that the graces of this sacrament are available to all.

A second way of observing this year is through the practice of indulgences – a plenary or full indulgence – which, as Pope Francis notes in *Misericordiae Vultus*, is always part of a Jubilee Year. In the letter issued last week regarding the sacrament of Penance, the Pope also spoke of indulgences:

To experience and obtain the Indulgence, the faithful are called to make a brief pilgrimage to the Holy Door, open in every Cathedral or in the churches designated by the Diocesan Bishop, and in the four Papal Basilicas in Rome, as a sign of the deep desire for true conversion. Likewise, I dispose that the Indulgence may be obtained in the Shrines in which the Door of Mercy is open and in the churches which traditionally are identified as Jubilee Churches. It is important that this moment be linked, first and foremost, to the Sacrament of Reconciliation and to the celebration of the Holy Eucharist with a reflection on mercy. It will be necessary to accompany these celebrations with the profession of faith and with prayer for me and for the intentions that I bear in my heart for the good of the Church and of the entire world....

The Jubilee Indulgence can also be obtained for the deceased. We are bound to them by the witness of faith and charity that they have left us. Thus, as we remember them in the Eucharistic celebration, thus we can, in the great mystery of the Communion of Saints, pray for them, that the merciful Face of the Father free them of every remnant of fault and strongly embrace them in the unending beatitude.

Praying for the souls in Purgatory is a great act of mercy on our part. And the existence of Purgatory is a sign of God’s love and mercy. I often think there could be nothing more merciful. How blessed are we that we have opportunity after opportunity to experience God’s Mercy on earth through the sacrament of Penance. And then, as if that were not enough, we have Purgatory so that we can truly be ready for the Kingdom. What a gift!

A third way of celebrating this year is through performing the **Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy**. So important are these acts that the Pope has said:

I have asked the Church in this Jubilee Year to rediscover the richness encompassed by the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. Each time that one of the faithful personally performs one or more of these actions, he or she shall surely obtain the Jubilee Indulgence.

Let us each take the opportunity to review these acts of Mercy with our students:

The Spiritual Works of Mercy

Admonish the sinner
Instruct the ignorant
Counsel the doubtful
Comfort the sorrowful
Bear wrongs patiently
Forgive all injuries
Pray for the living and the dead

The Corporal Works of Mercy

Feed the hungry
Give drink to the thirsty
Clothe the naked
Shelter the homeless
Visit the sick
Visit the imprisoned
Bury the dead

VI. CONCLUSION

Pope Francis ends *Misericordiae Vultus* by turning to Our Blessed Mother, the Mother of Mercy.

My thoughts now turn to the Mother of Mercy. May the sweetness of her countenance watch over us in this Holy Year, so that all of us may rediscover the joy of God's tenderness. No one has penetrated the profound mystery of the incarnation like Mary. Her entire life was patterned after the presence of mercy made flesh. The Mother of the Crucified and Risen One has entered the sanctuary of divine mercy because she participated intimately in the mystery of His love.

Chosen to be the Mother of the Son of God, Mary, from the outset, was prepared by the love of God to be the *Ark of the Covenant* between God and man. She treasured divine mercy in her heart in perfect harmony with her Son Jesus. Her hymn of praise, sung at the threshold of the home of Elizabeth, was dedicated to the mercy of God which extends from "generation to generation" (*Lk 1:50*). We too were included in those prophetic words of the Virgin Mary. This will be a source of comfort and strength to us as we cross the threshold of the Holy Year to experience the fruits of divine mercy.

At the foot of the Cross, Mary, together with John, the disciple of love, witnessed the words of forgiveness spoken by Jesus. This supreme expression of mercy towards those who crucified him show us the point to which the mercy of God can reach. Mary attests that the mercy of the Son of God knows no bounds and extends to everyone, without exception. Let us address her in the words of

the *Salve Regina*, a prayer ever ancient and ever new, so that she may never tire of turning her merciful eyes upon us, and make us worthy to contemplate the face of mercy, her Son Jesus.

To bring this talk full circle, I return to my own life. I was baptized at Our Lady of Mercy parish and spent the earliest years of my education there. In my adulthood I began my teaching career at that same parish. My mother once told me that she prayed to Our Lady for each of her five daughters, their spouses and children, under a different title for each. For me, she always prayed to Our Lady of Mercy. Somehow now that seems so appropriate!

And finally, when Kevin was lowered into the ground last August, the community of those who were there sang together the ancient chant:

**Salve, Regina, Mater misericordiæ,
vita, dulcedo, et spes nostra, salve.
Ad te clamamus exsules filii Hevæ,
Ad te suspiramus, gementes et flentes
in hac lacrimarum valle.**

**Eia, ergo, advocata nostra, illos tuos
misericordes oculos ad nos converte;
Et Jesum, benedictum fructum ventris tui,
nobis post hoc exilium ostende.
O clemens, O pia, O dulcis Virgo Maria**

"For His mercy endures forever."(Psalm 136)