

FATHER
of
Mercy

Prayer

God of compassion, You sent Jesus to proclaim a time of mercy reaching out to those who had no voice, releasing those trapped by their own shame, and welcoming those scorned by society. Make us ambassadors of reconciliation. Open our ears that we may listen with respect and understanding. Touch our lips that we may speak your words of peace and forgiveness. Warm our hearts that we may bring wholeness to the broken-hearted and dissolve the barriers of division.

Guide the work of your Church and renew us with the Spirit of your love. Help us and all people shape a world where all will have a place, where the flames of hatred are quenched, and where all can grow together as one.

Forgive, restore and strengthen us through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

<https://www.paulist.org/reconciliation/prayer-reconciliation>

What is Mercy?

forgiveness

mercy

empathy

love

kindness

inclusivity

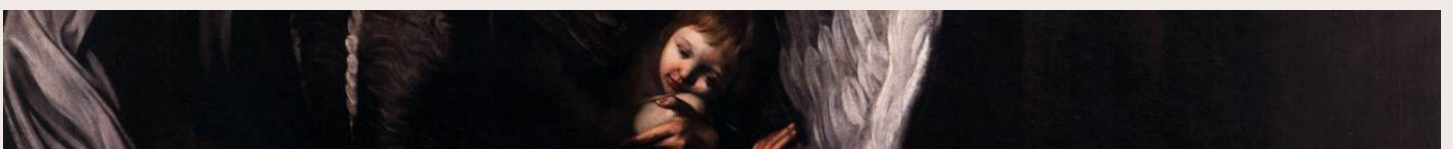
compassion

understanding



Mercy is a concept central to an understanding of God's dealings with humankind. It describes a quality of God and one that God requires of his people. Being **Merciful** denotes compassion and love expressed in tangible ways. The experience of God's **mercy** is a fundamental part of our Christian faith. It is the belief that Jesus Christ our judge is, before that, our **merciful liberator**. Christianity proclaims that Christ died on the cross and rose from the dead so we could be absolved from the consequences of our sin – the ultimate **merciful** act: 'Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends' (John 15:13). The three great Abrahamic faiths (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) share this central belief: that a moral and authoritative God chooses **mercy** over punishment.

Adapted from Summer 2016, Australian Catholics Peter Fleming 26th January 2016



Cardinal Walter Kasper in 'Mercy' states that "The most important expression for understanding mercy is hesed, which means unmerited loving kindness, friendliness, favour, and also divine grace and mercy. The concept expresses an unexpected and unmerited gift of God's grace that exceeds all human expectations and bursts every human category"

(Kasper, p.43)

Hesed: Enduring, Eternal, Undeserved Love

Hesed goes beyond mere emotion and grief at human deprivation; it means God's free and gracious turning toward the human person with care. ... In the message of God's hesed, something of the mystery of God ... is revealed.

What do we mean then when we speak of 'Doing Mercy' or of 'Being Merciful'?

Mercy in Scripture

THE OLD TESTAMENT:

Here God is described as Merciful. His mercy and **Hesed** (Covenant love) are integrally related. In this relationship, it is God's mercy which leads him to create a relationship with Israel. The mercy he gives is gracious, unmerited and undeserved. It is linked to compassion leading to forgiveness, and to the steadfast love by which God sustains the covenant and repeatedly forgives his people.

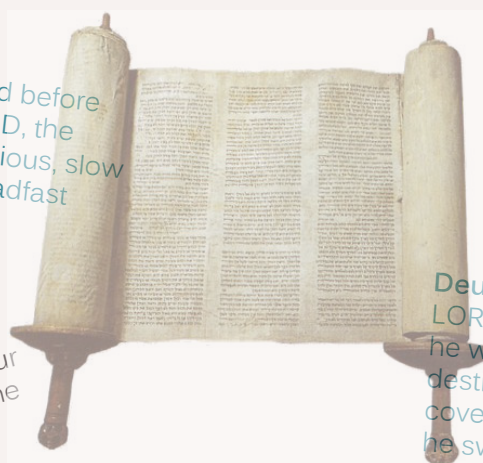
For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love (hesed) shall not depart from you.

(Isaiah 54:10)

Adapted from: <http://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/mercy/>

Exodus 34:6: The LORD passed before him, and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

Psalm 108:4: For your steadfast love is higher than the heavens and your faithfulness reaches to the clouds.



Psalm 103:8: The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

Deuteronomy 4:31: Because the LORD your God is a merciful God, he will neither abandon you nor destroy you; he will not forget the covenant with your ancestors that he swore to them.



Mercy in Scripture (cont)

THE NEW TESTAMENT:

The pattern of God's dealings with people in the Old Testament, at the core of which is mercy, also provides an understanding of his relationship with people in the New Testament. The New Testament speaks of the theme of God's mercy in the light of Christ, the supreme expression of love, mercy, and grace.

In the Magnificat Mary recalls the mercy of God, expressed in his continuing faithfulness to Israel: Luke 1:50 His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. People come into relationship with God only because God shows mercy to them. The great Acts of mercy shown by God to the people of Israel found intimate expression in the ministry of Christ. Salvation thus rests on God's mercy as executed in and through the Christ-event. In this awareness of God's past, present, and future mercy toward us, an element of our response to God takes on a new force in the New Testament. Christians are to be channels of God's mercy in the church and in the world.

Adapted from: <http://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/mercy/>

Luke 1:50: His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation.

Romans 9:15-16: "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." So it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who shows mercy.

2 Corinthians 1:3: Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation.

Luke 6:36: And the theme of the Year of Mercy is: 'Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful'.

2 John 3: Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father's Son, in truth and love.



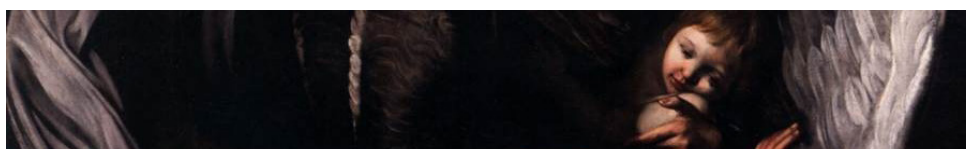
Was there a particular quote that spoke to you of God's mercy? Why?

Scripture Reading: Luke 15:11-32

The Parable of the Prodigal Son

"In the parables devoted to mercy, Jesus reveals the nature of God as that of a Father who never gives up until he has forgiven the wrong and overcome rejection with compassion and mercy."

Pope Francis.



Some Time for Quiet Reflection ...

A reflection by Pope Francis on the Parable of the Merciful Father

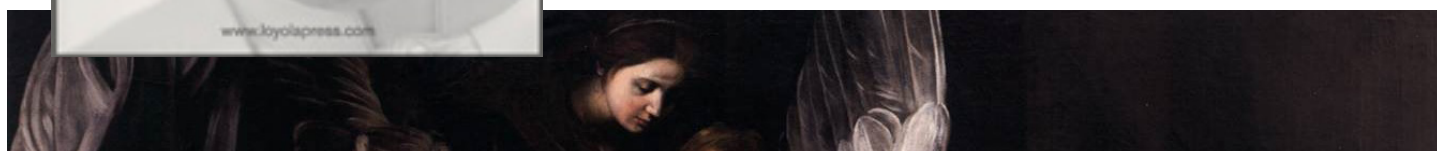
I am always struck when I reread the parable of the merciful father; it impresses me because it always gives me great hope. Think of that younger son who was in the father's house, who was loved; and yet he wants his part of the inheritance. He goes off, spends everything, hits rock bottom, where he could not be more distant from the father. Yet when he is at his lowest, he misses the warmth of the father's house and he goes back. And the father? Had he forgotten the son? No, never. He is there, he sees the son from afar; he was waiting for him every hour of every day. The son was always in his father's heart, even though he had left him, even though he had squandered his whole inheritance, his freedom. The father, with patience, love, hope, and mercy had never for a second stopped thinking about him, and as soon as he sees him still far off, he runs out to meet him and embraces him with tenderness, the tenderness of God, without a word of reproach: his son has returned! And that is the joy of the father. In that embrace for his son is all this joy: he has returned! God is always waiting for us; he never grows tired. Jesus shows us this merciful patience of God so that we can regain confidence, hope-always! A great German theologian, Romano Guardini, said that God responds to our weakness by his patience, and this is the reason for our confidence, our hope (see *Glaubenserkenntnis* [Würzburg, 1949], p. 28). It is like a dialogue between our weakness and the patience of God; it is a dialogue that, if we have it, will grant us hope.

I would like to emphasize one other thing: God's patience has to call forth in us the courage to return to him, however many mistakes and sins there may be in our life. Jesus tells Thomas to put his hand in the wounds of his hands and his feet and in his side. We too can enter the wounds of Jesus; we can actually touch him. This happens every time we receive the sacraments with faith. St. Bernard, in a fine homily, said: "Through the wounds of Jesus I can suck honey from the rock and oil from the flinty rock (see Deut. 32:13), I can taste and see the goodness of the Lord" (On the Song of Songs 61:4). It is there, in the wounds of Jesus, that we are truly secure; there we encounter the boundless love of his heart. Thomas understood this. St. Bernard goes on to ask: But what can I count on? My own merits? No. "My merit is God's mercy. I am by no means lacking merits as long as he is rich in mercy. If the mercies of the Lord are manifold, I too will abound in merits" (61:5). This is important: the courage to trust in Jesus' mercy, to trust in his patience, to seek refuge always in the wounds of his love. St. Bernard even stated, "So what if my conscience gnaws at me for my many sins? 'Where sin has abounded, there grace has abounded all the more' (Rom. 5:20)" (61:5).

Maybe someone among us here is thinking, My sin is so great, I am as far from God as the younger son in the parable; my unbelief is like that of Thomas. I don't have the courage to go back, to believe that God can welcome me and that he is waiting for me, of all people. But God is indeed waiting for you; he asks of you only the courage to go to him. How many times in my pastoral ministry have I heard it said, "Father, I have many sins"? And I have always pleaded, "Don't be afraid, go to him, he is waiting for you, he will take care of everything." We hear many offers from the world around us; but let us take up God's offer instead: his is a caress of love. For God, we are not numbers, we are important; indeed we are the most important thing to him. Even if we are sinners, we are what is closest to his heart.



Excerpt from *The Church of Mercy* by Pope Francis.
<http://www.loyolapress.com/pope-francis-on-the-parable-of-the-merciful-father.htm>



Some Questions to Ponder ...

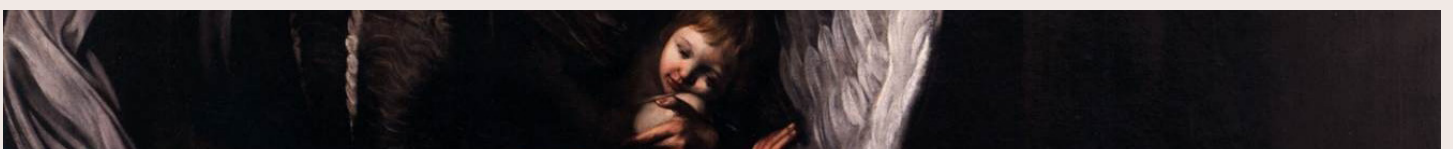
Henri Nouwen's in his book *The Return of the Prodigal Son* says:

'Conversion begins when we stop standing as judge in order to kneel as sinner. When we are humble and contrite of heart we will not be spurned by God— nor by each other'.

What am I going to do to change my attitude? How am I going to change for the better?



*Being Merciful denotes compassion and love expressed in tangible ways.
List three ways in which YOU are going to be merciful this coming week.*



Some quotes on Mercy from Water from the Rock

28. Since the time of Marcellin, his disciples have made Mary known and loved. Today we continue to be convinced that to follow Jesus in the way of Mary is a privileged way of bringing our Christian journey to fullness. With a heart filled with compassion, we share this experience and conviction with children and youth helping them to experience the maternal face of the Church.

36. This spirituality of simplicity shapes the whole life of the disciples of Marcellin. In humility, we seek to know ourselves in our strengths and weaknesses and readily accept the help we may need. We grow to be at peace with the person God has created.



37. Approaching others with openness and gratitude, we accept them as they are, and readily listen to how they experience us. We willingly offer forgiveness and take the first step toward reconciliation.

55. God is revealed to us through those we meet. Young and old people, members of our families and communities, the refugee and prisoner, the sick person and the caregiver, our co-worker and our neighbour, all are mirrors reflecting the God of life and of love.

56. We experience God also in the witness of people committed to peace, justice, and solidarity with the poor and those who act with generosity and self-sacrifice in the service of others.

57. All the people and events of life offer an opportunity to encounter our merciful God. Perhaps we meet God most closely when we are vulnerable and hurting or when we stand by our word despite the cost to ourselves. When we give thanks for the gift of life, when we heal relationships, when we offer and receive forgiveness, when we celebrate the Eucharist and share the Word - all can be moments of grace to meet and know God.

Do we always accept people as they are?

Think of someone who has put their faith into action. How have their actions revealed God's love and mercy?

Can you think of a time when you experienced God's mercy?

Final Reflection

Heart of Jesus, Heart of Mercy, A hymn for the Jubilee Year of Mercy.

Ezekiel 36:24-28

Br Michael Herry FMS

<http://www.maristmusic.org.au/hymn-for-the-jubilee-year-of-mercy>

