

THE GREAT JUBILEE YEAR OF MERCY

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ABSTRACT

The Church is at the service of men and women in their earthly undertaking. Hence, she claims no other authority than that of ministering to human persons with the help of God, in a spirit of charity and faithful service geared towards eternal salvation (cf. Austin Flannery (ed.), Vatican Council II, Venite Seorsum, p.586). Consequently, the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well. Nothing that is genuinely human, fails to find an echo in their hearts and that is why Christians cherish a feeling of deep solidarity with the human race and its history (cf. Vatican Council II, Gaudium et Spes, n. 1). In other words, all Christians by the example of their lives and the witness of the word, wherever they live, have an obligation to manifest the new man which they put on in baptism and to reveal the power of the Holy Spirit by whom they were strengthened at confirmation, so that others, seeing their good works might glorify the Father (Vatican II, Ad Gentes Divinius, n.11). This therefore, becomes a clarion call to all and sundry to live out Deeds of Mercy!

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Overtime and in recent years, the church through her yearly calendar has maintained the tradition of projecting its expectation and the religious direction for the spiritual life of her children. The calendar serves as a guide that enables the church and her faithful to navigate properly towards the will of the Father, grow in particular virtue and pray as a community. Thus in the record, the church's faithful have experienced from the various calendar years of the church, the year of St Paul, the year of the Rosary, the year of the Holy Eucharist, the year of the Priest, the year of the Religious etc. Indeed in a most intense spiritual way the faithful have benefitted from the fruits of these calendar years and exercises proclaimed by the church.

Following this tradition, Pope Francis in the BULL OF INDICATION OF THE EXTRAORDINARY JUBILEE OF MERCY, *Misericordiae Vultus* (MV) declared the calendar year 2016, *the Jubilee year of Mercy*. This holy year, opened on 8 December 2015, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception recalls God's action from the very beginning of the history of mankind and calls the faithful to gaze even more attentively on mercy so as to become a more effective sign of the Father's action in the world. (MV 3)

The extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy according to the Pope is an opportunity for "the Church to make more evident its mission of being a witness of the Divine Mercy, after Christ, the face of the Father's mercy made living and visible by his deeds, his actions, and his entire person (MV 2). A symbolic element of the *extraordinary Jubilee year of mercy* is the opening of the Holy Door which becomes a *Door of Mercy* through which anyone who enters will experience the love of God who consoles, pardons, and instils hope.

The Jubilee year of Mercy is for the faithful an encounter with the mercy of God in a special way, and an opportunity to become channels and conduits bearing the mercy of God to others through concrete assistance. For the church, it is a year to send "Missionaries of Mercy" throughout the world to forgive even the gravest sins". It is also an avenue to re-awaken in us

the need to carry on with the works of mercy which seem to have been drowned in the waters of egoism and cynicism. It is therefore on this note that this article borders on the Holy Year of Mercy from the viewpoint of the Corporal/Spiritual Works of Mercy so that wherever there are Christians, everyone will find an oasis of mercy.

2.0 THE WORLD TODAY AND A MERCIFUL GOD

The declaration of the jubilee year of mercy is timely and indeed a prompt call placed to a wretched and misery stricken world for an appreciation of the Mercy of God. For even though, every generation attempts to improve the standard of human living, attend to the needs of their immediate society and seeks to develop the world; even though we live in a world that is so sophisticated that it seems sufficient in so many ways; even though, our world is one of scientific breakthroughs and explosions that sometimes go beyond our sense of wonder and imagination; even though we have a world of technological advancements that leaves us in utter amazement and fascination, a world that seems to echo “all things are possible”, we are still suffering pain and wickedness.

Thus, amidst all the glamour and pageantry, the needs of humanity remain insatiable. Man’s thirst is still unquenchable; his hunger continues to crave for satisfaction and these leaves him restless and restive; he has no peace. This is so because there is something fundamental that is lacking, a space that needs to be filled, and the reason for this is because that which is most important has been relegated. The “what” that makes the “Being” of mankind is sacrificed on the altar of “having”. The essence of our relationship with God and one another has been overtaken and humanity is left with pain, misery, anguish, agony and wickedness engineered by man against man.

St Pope John Paul II in his encyclical *Dives in Misericordia*, laments over this and called it: “the lack of mercy in the technological world”; and this is so because we rarely experience mercy in our individual human relationships. People speak of nuclear might, economic strength, capitalism and political agenda, but mercy is never mentioned. We live by aggressive violence in our hearts, and this manifests in the inhuman tenets we witness every day. Beside our affluent society are millions of homeless and hungry people deprived of basic human needs and dignity. Condescending pity is given them, but little of compassionate mercy.

Switch on the television; go through the pages of the newspapers or visit the internet. What we see and read about are stories that send shivers down the spine leaving us to wonder if these acts are being perpetrated by men and women made in the image and likeness of a merciful God. And we ask: is this the world created by God? Is this the humanity created by a Merciful God?

Scripture tells us that when God created the world, Goodness, Love and visibly Mercy were the attributes that preceded his act of creation: he found everything good (Gen 1:31); in love he created man and in Mercy he shared all he had with him. Thus, from the beginning, it was on account of his mercy and love that God chose to create man in his own image and likeness (Cf. Gen 1:26); in the light of his mercy, God made man the custodian of creation: “So out of the ground the LORD God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name”. God did not stop at that, in Genesis 1:28 God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” Thus, man became a co-creator with God.

We therefore bear no doubt that mankind has enjoyed the mercy of God but have failed in appreciating the Mercy of God. Humanity, a product of the mercy has strayed away from that mercy. Mankind has forgotten the prominence of mercy in our life and that the world needs mercy and that we are to model ourselves after Christ the Divine Mercy Incarnate.

The Jubilee year of Mercy in the words of Pope Francis is a time for us to constantly contemplate the mystery of mercy as a wellspring of joy, serenity, and peace. “Our salvation depends on it because Mercy reveals the very mystery of the Most Holy Trinity. Mercy is the ultimate and supreme act by which God comes to meet us. Mercy is the fundamental law that dwells in the heart of every person who looks sincerely into the eyes of his brothers and sisters on the path of life. Mercy is the bridge that connects God and man, opening our hearts to a hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness.

3.0 JUSTICE AT THE SERVICE OF MERCY- THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

Following Thomistic view, justice is defined as “the firm and constant will to give to each one his due” or “as the fulfilment of that to which our neighbour has a strict right” (Peschke,236)

However, *Mercy which entails compassion and forgiveness shown towards someone whom it is within one’s power to punish or harm* 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 should lack mercy. The Church’s very credibility is seen in how she shows mercy and compassion. The Church has an *endless desire to show mercy* (Evangelii Gaudium,24).

A glaring fact that stares us in the face is 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 be merciful 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.

Saint John Paul II in his Encyclical, *Dives in Misericordia*, while decrying the precarious nature of human situation in today’s world highlighted the fact that we have forgotten the theme of mercy in today’s cultural milieu. In his words: “The present-day mentality, perhaps more 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. But then, “*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*”(John Paul,13).

Therefore, since the Church’s first truth is the love of Christ, the Church makes herself a servant of this love and mediates it to all people: a love that forgives and expresses itself in the gift of oneself. Consequently, wherever the Church is present, the mercy of the Father must be evident. In our parishes, communities, associations and movements, “*wherever there are Christians, everyone should find an oasis of mercy*”(Francis, paragraph 12). Hence, this

Jubilee Year and beyond, is to be lived in the light of the Lord's words: "Be merciful just as your Father is merciful" (*Lk* 6:36).

4.0 THE JUBILEE YEAR OF MERCY VIS-À-VIS THE CORPORAL/SPIRITUAL WORKS OF MERCY

The "great river of mercy", as Pope Francis calls it in *Misericordiae Vultus*, "never runs dry" because there are always those who are willing to perform acts of mercy in their everyday lives. *In this Holy Year, we look forward to the experience of opening our hearts to those living on the outermost fringes of society: fringes which modern society itself creates.* How many uncertain and painful situations there are in the world today! How many are the wounds borne by the flesh of those who have no voice because their cry is muffled and drowned out by the indifference of the rich! *During this Jubilee, the Church is called even more to heal these wounds, to assuage them with the oil of consolation, to bind them with mercy and cure them with solidarity and vigilant care.* Let us therefore, not fall into humiliating indifference or a monotonous routine that prevents us from discovering what is new! Let us ward off destructive cynicism thereby opening our eyes to see the misery of the world, the wounds of our brothers and sisters who are denied their dignity, and let us recognize that we are compelled to heed their cry for help! May we reach out to them and support them so that they can feel the warmth of our presence, our friendship, and our fraternity! *May their cry become our own, and together may we break down the barriers of indifference that too often reign supreme and mask our hypocrisy and egoism!*

It is the burning desire of the Church that, during this Jubilee, the Christian people may reflect on the *corporal and spiritual works of mercy*. It will be a way to reawaken our conscience, too often grown dull in the face of poverty. We are to invariably enter more deeply into the heart of the Gospel where the poor have a special experience of God's mercy. Jesus introduces us to these works of mercy in his preaching so that we can know whether or not we are living as His disciples. Thus we must rediscover these *corporal works of mercy: to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, heal the sick, visit the imprisoned, and bury the dead. And let us not forget the spiritual works of mercy: to counsel the doubtful, instruct the ignorant, admonish sinners, comfort the afflicted, forgive offences, bear patiently those who do us ill, and pray for the living and the dead.*

We cannot escape the Lord's words to us, and they will serve as the criteria upon which we will be judged: whether we have fed the hungry and given drink to the thirsty, welcomed the stranger and clothed the naked, or spent time with the sick and those in prison (cf. *Mt* 25:31-45). Moreover, we will be asked if we have helped others to escape the doubt that made them fall into despair and which is often a source of loneliness; if we have helped the ignorant to overcome their poor knowledge of the ordinances and ways of the father; if we have been close to the lonely and afflicted; if we have forgiven those who have offended us and have rejected all forms of anger and hate that lead to violence; and if we have commended our brothers and sisters to the Lord in prayer.

In the Gospel of Luke 4:18ff, we find another important element that will enriches our faith. Luke writes that Jesus, on the Sabbath, went back to Nazareth and, as was his custom, entered the synagogue. They called upon Him to read the Scripture and to comment on it. The passage was from the Book of Isaiah where it is written: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted; he has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and freedom to those in captivity; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour" (*Is* 61:1-2). A "year of the Lord's favour" or "mercy": this is what the Lord proclaimed and we are experiencing now: A Year

that brings to the fore the richness of Jesus' mission echoed in the words of the prophet: to bring words of consolation to the poor, to proclaim liberty to those bound by any form of slavery, to restore sight to those who can see no more because they are caught up in themselves, to restore dignity to all those from whom it has been robbed.

5.0 CONCLUSION

From the foregoing, we make bold to say that "mankind will not have peace until it turns to God's mercy" (*Diary*, ix) which must be dual faceted, in that as we receive mercy from God, we extend same to our neighbours and to sinners. It has always been the Father's desire that sinners approach His mercy without fear, for Christ tells us that "... the flames of mercy are burning me, clamouring to be spent; I want to pour them out upon these souls" (*Diary*, 50). But then, God wants us to "Ask" for His Mercy, "Be" Merciful ourselves and have "Complete Trust" for without these, our Christian life will be counter-productive. Hence, just as Christ asked St. Maria Faustina, so He is asking us today: How long shall I put up with you and how long will you keep putting me off? (*Diary*, 9) It is therefore our prayer that each one of us may in this Year of Mercy and subsequently experience the power of the Blood and Water that poured out from the Heart of Jesus as a fount of mercy, and may each of us find confidence and trust in this ever-present mercy of God.

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