



## MESSAGE FOR JUBILEE YEAR OF MERCY

**What the world needs most today, more than at any time in history, is mercy.** In the world of science and technology, there is no place for mercy. This lack of mercy is evident in the violent destruction of human life and habitat. Ironically, such acts are often justified in the name of justice. Many of these acts of terrorism are committed in the name of God and love. In the guise of mercy, we advocate the abortion of babies so that they will not be without parental love; euthanasia is encouraged so that the elderly need not suffer loneliness or meaningless pain in their illness. The truth is that such actions are contrary to our profession of love and mercy, for where there is love and compassion; we will truly care for the helpless babies and the elderly.

**This lack of mercy is also apparent in a world where people are valued in terms of their utility.** We make use of people for our ambition and to fulfil our needs. People are not loved and accepted for who they are but what they can do for us.

**This lack of mercy is also revealed in the way we regard sinners and those who have hurt us.** Indeed, many Catholics are wounded because they feel judged, condemned and rejected by the community for being unable to live out their lives according to the laws. As a consequence, they conclude that God does not love them as well. The Church, as the mercy of Christ, must reach out to such people and show them compassion and understanding. Like Jesus, we need to let them know that we care because it is the sick that needs the doctor, not the healthy. Hence, we need to be more compassionate and understanding towards those who are struggling to live up to the ideals of the gospel. Holiness is a gift from the Lord. Without His grace, we too would have fallen. So instead of boasting about our strength, we must boast about the mercy of God.

**In the light of the Jubilee year of mercy, let us join Pope Francis in reiterating the centrality of the gospel of mercy** reflected in the Old Testament and particularly in the New Testament. The heart of Jesus' ministry is one of mercy and compassion. St Paul gives the doctrine of justification by faith, that is, trust in God's mercy and forgiveness as the starting point of a right relationship with the Lord. What the Lord is asking of us is not sacrifice but mercy. We are called to radiate the image of the Father of mercy in our daily life, whether in almsgiving, in works of mercy and compassion or in forgiveness of those who have hurt us, and seek reconciliation with them, reaching out to sinners and those rejected by society and the world.

**What prevents us from having a heart of mercy? If mercy is wanting, it is because of the sin of pride that leads us to self-righteousness.** We become dogmatic in the way we look at life. We measure people against doctrines. Whilst doctrines are important to show us the truth of love, yet, we need to find a pastoral approach to help people to live up to the ideals of perfect love



and to show compassion when they fall short in spite of their sincerity to be true to what they subscribe to in their hearts. We also need to avoid legalism, as if things are all neatly classified as black and white. The laws remain objective norms; yet we need to consider the circumstances, the context, the intention and the motives of the actions of the person. That is why God does not judge the external performance, what we do, but why we did it and the circumstances. God as the judge of mercy takes everything into consideration. Thus, Jesus on the cross could say to His enemies, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they were doing."

**But if mercy is lacking, it also stems from hidden and unresolved anger and resentment in our hearts.** Many of us who have been hurt by our parents, superiors and even our peers, cannot let go of the hurts or even abuses we have suffered. We either suppress or repress them. As a consequence what is unhealed or un-forgiven hinders us from being free to love freely and be merciful. History repeats itself as we unconsciously make others suffer what we have gone through in life. Instead of learning from the mistakes of those who have hurt us, we perpetuate their sins. Isn't this what original sin is all about? Not only are we in solidarity with sin but we perpetuate the sins of our forefathers in our lives.

**Finally, the lack of mercy comes from selfishness, self-centeredness and slavishness to the pleasures of the world.** It comes from the sins of envy, sloth, greed, gluttony and lust. We want to satisfy our own pleasures. We seek our own security at the expense of others. We grab all we can for ourselves but will not sacrifice our time and energy for the service of others. It is about me, my wants and my needs. It is the age of individualism, materialism, and consumerism.

**How, then, can we become channels of God's mercy? By being aware and conscious of our sins, inadequacies, lack of fulfilment, love and forgiveness!** Only by becoming aware of our poverty in love and mercy and at the same time, of our selfishness and hatred of others, can we then begin to seek for God's mercy. So the realization of one's sins and the state of our soul is the first step towards seeking for God's mercy. To be merciful, we must first receive God's mercy. We cannot render mercy to others if we do not know the joy of receiving mercy.

**How, then, can we open ourselves to God's mercy?** We must contemplate on the mercy of God in Christ Jesus. Reading and praying the scriptures with devotion, contemplating on the Father of mercy and the paschal mystery of our Lord, especially on the cross and at the Eucharist, is of great help. Devotional prayers like the Stations of the Cross and the Divine Mercy chaplet are of great help in entering into the mercy and compassion of Christ so that we can live out that mercy encountered in our daily life. During this Jubilee Year of Mercy, I propose that Catholics undertake prayerful spiritual pilgrimages in our backyard, visiting designated parishes, particularly the Church of Divine Mercy. This pilgrimage, whether undertaken within or outside Singapore, is not for sightseeing but to pray, reflect and contemplate on Christ's mercy as we



remember that we are pilgrims on the way. Better still, make time to do a personal or community retreat that brings us into contact with God's mercy and forgiveness.

**The most privileged place to experience the mercy of God is through the Sacrament of Reconciliation.** I appeal to all priests and religious to frequent the Sacrament of Reconciliation regularly, for unless they themselves have experienced the mercy of God, they cannot mediate His mercy to the penitents. In exercising the Ministry of Reconciliation, confessors must be mindful that they are ministers of mercy and compassion. They should be more attentive, understanding, patient, compassionate, encouraging, consoling and forgiving to their penitents. They should make it a point to be more available for the Sacrament of Reconciliation, waiting for the penitents to come, rather than have the penitents seek them out.

**In the same vein, I encourage all Catholics to make regular confession, at least once a month, and attend at least one Mass a week in addition to Sunday Mass, so that they can receive the healing grace of God through the Sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist.** They should also join in the monthly parish Holy Hour and Adoration, focusing on the love and mercy of Christ on the cross and in the Eucharist. Those who are unable to participate in any of these activities could spend some time during the week in the parish's Adoration room. For those who are able to do more, fast from food, do penance or make acts of mortification during the week.

**Following the contemplation of God's mercy, we in turn must reach out to our brothers and sisters in the community.** Most importantly, mercy comes through forgiveness of those who have hurt us. By letting go, we find healing ourselves. We must seek reconciliation with those who have hurt us. In concrete ways, this mercy must be expressed in ministering to the poor, the suffering and the needy. As we reach out to them, our hearts will be open and through them, we come to experience the joy of mercy and love.

**So, without delay, spend some time before the Lord by beginning with a good examination of conscience and a well prepared, contrite and sincere celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.** This is aided by contemplating on His mercy and love so that we become more conscious of our sins and turn to Him for mercy. Having received His mercy, we can then become channels of God's mercy to others. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God." (1 Cor 2:3f)

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