

## THE MERCY OF GOD

### I) Introduction

During this celebration of the Jubilee Year of Mercy, it is important to reflect on this topic on God's Mercy, with an intention to seek to have deeper understanding of who God is in our life and seek to be closer to Him in our spiritual life.

We begin by noting that God's mercy is a monumental theme in Scripture, with the English word appearing some 341 times in the Bible. The four Hebrew and three Greek words associated with this term appear a total of 454 times and are also translated as "kindness," "lovingkindness," "goodness," "favor," "compassion," and "pity." By Henry M. Morris III, D. Min <http://www.icr.org/article/gods-everlasting-mercy> accessed on 15/09/2016.

For example, Psalm 136 repeats the theme "for His mercy endureth forever," each of the 26 verses listing incomparable aspects of God's kindness to us. (Ibid.).

Hence, we find Pope Francis, in his General Audience on 13<sup>th</sup> Jan 2016, noting that, "In Sacred Scripture, the Lord is presented as a *"merciful God"*. This is his name, through which he unveils, so to speak, his face and his heart to us. As the Book of Exodus recounts, on revealing himself to Moses he defined himself in this way: *"the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness"* (34:6). We also find this formula in other texts, with certain variations, but the emphasis is always placed on mercy and on the love of God who never tires of forgiving (cf. Gen 4:2; Joel 2:13; Ps 86 [85]: 15, 103 [102]: 8, 145[144]:8; Neh 9:17)." [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2016/documents/papa-francesco\\_20160113\\_udienza-generale.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2016/documents/papa-francesco_20160113_udienza-generale.html) accessed on 15/09/2016

### II) God of Mercy– Understanding Mercy

We begin by noting that, even though "mercy" is an important concept, it is somewhat difficult to prescribe a definition, especially since "grace" is occasionally closely coupled with it.

However similar these two terms may appear to be, these words are not synonyms. "Grace" is most often associated with the sovereign dispensing of totally undeserved favor, and is

specifically connected to salvation. "Mercy" is more often connected to the withholding of judgment: "Whoever acts without mercy will be judged without mercy but mercy can afford to laugh at judgement" (James 2:13).

God is known to be a God of mercy. Understanding mercy is often difficult for people as we tend to be a generation of "I'll get him for that" and "I hope they get what they deserve." Many have developed a nature of harsh criticism and want others to get what they have deserved coming to them. <http://www.allaboutgod.com/god-of-mercy.htm>, accessed on 15/09/2016.

God is often referred to as good or merciful. Hence, goodness or mercy is His attribute. Mercy is the result and effect of God's goodness (Psa 33:5).

Pope Francis when proclaiming the Year of Jubilee of Mercy, in the Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy *Misericordiae Vultus- The Face of Mercy*, started his reflection by stating that "Jesus Christ is the face of the Father's mercy. These words might well sum up the mystery of the Christian faith. Mercy has become living and visible in Jesus of Nazareth, reaching its culmination in him." (Pope Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, No. 1).

He went on to say "The Father, 'rich in mercy' (*Eph. 2: 4*), after having revealed his name to Moses as 'a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness' (*Ex. 34: 6*), has never ceased to show, in various ways throughout history, his divine nature" (Ibid.).

Reflecting further, during the General Audience on 13<sup>th</sup> Jan 2016, on the Mercy of God, Pope Francis concentrated his meditation on the name God revealed to Moses, bringing out the five dimensions of God's name, in order to help us deepen our faith in God's Mercy.

**First**, he said, to say that "The Lord is '*merciful*': this word evokes a tender approach like that of a mother toward her child. Indeed, the Hebrew term used in the Bible evokes the viscera or even the maternal womb. Therefore, the image it suggests is that of a God *who is moved and who softens for us* like a mother when she takes her child in her arms, wanting only to love, protect, help, ready to give everything, even herself. This is the image that this term evokes. A love, therefore, which can be defined in the best sense as '*visceral*'."

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**Second**, we further note that, "...the Lord is '*gracious*', in the sense of having grace, he has compassion and, in his greatness, he bends down to those who are weak and poor, ever ready to welcome, to understand, to forgive. He is like the father in the parable recounted in the Gospel of Luke (cf. Lk 15:11-32): a father who does not withdraw in resentment at the younger son for having forsaken him, but on the contrary, he continues to await him — he begot him — and then he runs to meet him and embraces him. He does not even let him explain — as though he had covered his mouth — so great is his love and joy at having found him again" (Ibid.).

In addition, Pope Francis further shows how gracious and merciful God is by showing that the same father is so gracious that, in Lk. 15, he "also goes to call the older son who is offended and does not want to join in the celebration, the son who always stayed home and who lived more as a servant than as a son. To him too, the father bends down, invites him to enter, tries to open his heart to love, so that no one is excluded from the celebration of mercy." Here Pope Francis reminds us that God expect all of us to join in celebration of mercy: Mercy is a celebration! (Ibid.).

**Third**, Pope Francis notes that "...this merciful God...is '*slow to anger*', literally, 'of great breadth', that is, having a *broad capacity of forbearance and patience*. God knows how to wait, his time is not the impatient one of man; he is like the wise farmer who knows how to wait, allowing time for the good seed to grow, in spite of the weeds (cf. Mt 13:24-30)" (Ibid.).

**Fourth**, in addition, "...the Lord proclaims himself '*abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness*'. How beautiful this definition of God is! It is all-encompassing. For God is great and powerful, and this greatness and power are used to love us, who are so small, so incompetent. The word "*love*", used here, indicates *affection, grace, goodness*. It is not soap opera love.... It is love which takes the first step, which does not depend on human merit but on immense gratuitousness. It is divine solicitude that nothing can impede, not even sin, because it is able to go beyond sin, to overcome evil and forgive it" (Ibid.).

**Fifth**, Pope Francis notes that God of mercy finally has another quality, "Abounding in '*faithfulness*': this is the final word of God's revelation to Moses. God's faithfulness never fails, because the Lord is the guardian who, as the Psalm says, never slumbers but keeps constant vigil over us in order to lead us to life: 'May he not suffer your foot to slip; may he slumber not who

guards you: Indeed he neither slumbers nor sleeps, the guardian of Israel.... The Lord will guard you from all evil; he will guard your life. The Lord will guard your coming and your going, both now and forever' (Ps 121[120]:3-4, 7-8)." (Ibid.)

Through this part we have endeavoured to understand what Mercy of God is and the invitation to believe in this mercy. Let us look at some of the qualifications in order to deepen our faith in God's Mercy this Jubilee Year of Mercy.

### **III) The Qualifications or Properties of God's Mercy.**

#### **1) *God's Mercy is Free.***

To set up merit is to destroy mercy. Nothing can deserve mercy. As God's mercy makes the saints happy, so it should make them humble. Mercy is not the fruit of our goodness, but the fruit of God's goodness. Mercy is an alms that God bestows. They have no cause to be proud that live upon the alms of God's mercy. "If I be righteous, yet will I not lift up my head," (Job 10:15). Each one of us should say 'all my righteousness is the effect of God's mercy, therefore I will be humble and will not lift up my head'. Election is free. He has chosen us in him, according to the good pleasure of his will (Eph 1:3-14). Justification is free: Being justified freely by his grace. Rom 3:1-4:25. Salvation is free. According to his mercy he saved us. Titus 3:3-7. Say not then, I am unworthy; for mercy is free. If God should show mercy to such only as are worthy, he would show none at all. Thomas Watson [http://biblehub.com/library/watson/a\\_body\\_of\\_divinity/9\\_the\\_mercy\\_of\\_god.htm](http://biblehub.com/library/watson/a_body_of_divinity/9_the_mercy_of_god.htm) accessed on 15/09/2016.

God of mercy, therefore, is merciful to even the worst offenders, sinners, and law-breakers. This means that even though He knows of our guilt, He doesn't always issue the punishment we deserve. To elaborate this gracious mercy of God, the verses in Romans 3:23-24 says "...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus." (Ibid.).

Simply, we are all sinners and do not meet the standards of righteousness that God intends us to have. But, through His mercy and grace, He provided a way for our sins to be forgiven through our acceptance of Christ Jesus—even though we don't deserve it. Coupled with grace (being

given God's free gift of forgiveness though we've done nothing to deserve it), mercy is shown because He loves us and only asks that we accept His Son by faith (Ibid.).

## **2) God's Mercy is an Overflowing Mercy; It is Infinite.**

"Rich in mercy", Eph 2:4. "Multitude of mercies", Psa 51:1. The vial of wrath drops, but the fountain of mercy runs. The sun is not so full of light as God is of mercy. God has morning mercies. His mercies are new every morning. He has night mercies. In the night his song shall be with us. God has mercies under heaven, which we taste; and in heaven, which we hope for (Ibid.).

One act of mercy engages God to another. It is a common argument among men thus, "I have shown you kindness already, therefore trouble me no more." But, because God has shown mercy, he is more ready still to show mercy; his mercy in election makes him justify, adopt, glorify; one act of mercy engages God to more. A parent's love to his child makes him always giving. (Ibid.).

## **3) God's Mercy is Eternal.**

The mercy of the Lord is from "everlasting to everlasting", Psa 103:17. "His mercy endureth for ever", is repeated twenty-six times in Psa 136. The souls of the blessed shall be ever bathing themselves in this sweet and pleasant ocean of God's mercy. "God's anger to his children lasts but a while, but his mercy lasts for ever", Psa 103:3. As long as He is God He will be showing mercy. As His mercy is overflowing, so it is ever flowing. (Ibid.).

## **IV) What Shall we do to Benefit from God's Mercy?**

### ***i) Believe in his Mercy:***

God's mercy is a fountain opened. Let down the bucket of faith and you may drink of this fountain of salvation. What greater encouragement to believe than God's mercy? God counts it his glory to be scattering pardons; he is desirous that sinners should touch the golden sceptre of his mercy and live. This willingness to show mercy appears two ways.

### ***ii) To love God:***

Mercy should be the attraction of love. God's justice may make us fear Him, His mercy instead makes us love him. If mercy will not produce love, what will? We are to love God for giving us

our food, much more for giving us grace; for sparing mercy, much more for saving mercy. Sure that heart is made of marble, which the mercy of God will not dissolve in love.

***iii) To look Upon God in Prayer:***

We are invited to look upon God in prayer, not in His judgement robes, but clothed with a rainbow full of mercy and clemency. This should make our hearts ascend with joy in prayer. In prayer we go to the Father of mercy, who sits upon the throne of grace. We should go to Him with confidence on His mercy; as when one goes to a fire, not doubtingly, saying, perhaps it will warm me, perhaps not.

***iv) Be Sensible of your Spiritual Needs:***

See how much you stand in need of pardoning, saving mercy. See yourselves orphans. “In thee the fatherless find mercy” (Hos. 14:4). God bestows the alms of mercy only on such as are indigent. Be emptied of all opinion of self-worthiness. God pours the golden oil of mercy into empty vessels. Let us remember the words of St. John who underlined the importance of awareness of sin by stating categorically that “if we say we have no sin in us, we are deceiving ourselves” (1Jn.1: 8).

***v) Go to God for Mercy:***

In our Christian life, since we are not worthy before His eyes, and having recognized our sinful state, let us cry with King David’s words: “Have mercy upon me, O God!” Psa. 51:1. Again Psa. 136 reminds us 26 times that “For his mercy endures forever” and, hence, we should go to Him, with repentant hearts. The same letter of St. John, reminds us that if we acknowledge our sins, then, we will receive his mercy, for God is trustworthy and upright, He will forgive us (1Jn. 1:9).

***vi) Be Humble Before God:***

As God's mercy makes the saints happy, so it should make them humble. Mercy is not the fruit of our goodness, but the fruit of God's goodness. Mercy is an alms that God bestows. They have no cause to be proud that live upon the alms of God's mercy. If I be righteous, yet will I not lift up my head,' Job 10:15: all my righteousness is the effect of God's mercy, therefore I will be humble and will not lift up my head.

***vii) Take Heed of Abusing the Mercy of God:***

Suck not poison out of the sweet flower of God's mercy. Think not that because God is merciful, you may go on in sin; this is to make mercy your enemy. None might touch the ark but the priests, who by their office were more holy; so none may touch the ark of God's mercy but such as are resolved to be holy. To sin because mercy abounds is the devil's logic. He that sins because of mercy, is like one that wounds his head because he has a plaster. He that sins because of God's mercy, shall have judgement without mercy. Mercy abused turns to fury. "The mercy of the Lord is upon them that fear him" Psa 103:17. Mercy is not for them that sin and fear not, but for them that fear and sin not. God's mercy is a holy mercy; where it pardons it heals.

***viii) Imitate God in Showing Mercy:***

As God is the Father of mercy, show yourselves to be his children, by being like him. Ambrose says, "The sum and definition of religion is, Be rich in works of mercy, be helpful to the bodies and souls of others. Scatter your golden seeds; let the lamp of your profession be filled with the oil of charity. Be merciful in giving and forgiving. 'Be ye merciful, as your heavenly Father is merciful' (Lk. 6:36)."

**Conclusion**

We conclude with Pope Francis' conclusion of his reflection on the Merciful God, by noting that "This merciful God is faithful in his mercy and St Paul says something beautiful: if you are not faithful to him, he will remain faithful, for he cannot deny himself. Faithfulness in mercy is the very being of God. For this reason God is totally and always trustworthy. A solid and steadfast presence. This is the assurance of our faith."

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Thus, in this Jubilee of Mercy, let us entrust ourselves to Him totally, and experience the joy of being loved by this 'God who is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in love and faithfulness'. Let us also strive to be *Merciful like the Father*.