

### 3. The Message of Jesus: “I Desire Mercy”

#### **Mercy: at the Heart of Jesus Message**

[M]ercy constitutes the fundamental content of the messianic message of Christ and the constitutive power of His mission. (John Paul II, *The Mercy of God*, no. 6)

#### **The Sermon on the Mount: “Blessed are the Merciful”**

“Blessed are the merciful (*eleēmōnes*), for they shall obtain mercy.” (Matthew 5:7)

#### **The Sermon on the Plain: “Be Merciful as Your Heavenly Father” (Luke 6)**

<sup>27</sup> “But I say to you that hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, <sup>28</sup> bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. <sup>29</sup> To him who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from him who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. <sup>30</sup> Give to every one who begs from you; and of him who takes away your goods do not ask them again. <sup>31</sup> And as you wish that men would do to you, do so to them. <sup>32</sup> “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. <sup>33</sup> And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. <sup>34</sup> And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. <sup>35</sup> But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the selfish. <sup>36</sup> *Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.*

<sup>37</sup> “*Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; <sup>38</sup> give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For the measure you give will be the measure you get back.*” (Luke 6:27-38)

#### **The Call of Matthew: “I Desire Mercy, Not Sacrifice” (Matthew 9)**

<sup>9</sup> As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax office; and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he rose and followed him. <sup>10</sup> And as he sat at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Jesus and his disciples. <sup>11</sup> And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” <sup>12</sup> But when he heard it, he said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. <sup>13</sup> *Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy (Greek *eleos*), and not sacrifice.’* For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.” (Matthew 9:9-13, quoting Hosea 6:6)

#### **The Parable of the Lost Sheep (Luke 15:1-7)**

<sup>1</sup> Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. <sup>2</sup> And the Pharisees and the scribes murmured, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.” <sup>3</sup> So he told them this parable: <sup>4</sup> “What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost, until he finds it? <sup>5</sup> And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. <sup>6</sup> And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost.’ <sup>7</sup> Just so, I

tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

### **The Parable of the Lost Coin (Luke 15:8-10)**

<sup>8</sup>“Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? <sup>9</sup>And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin which I had lost.’ <sup>10</sup>Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

### **John Paul II: The Parable of the Prodigal Son**

Although the word "mercy" does not appear [in the Prodigal Son], it nevertheless expresses the essence of the divine mercy in a particularly clear way. (John Paul II, *The Mercy of God*, no. 5)

### **The Parable of the Lost Son (Luke 15:11-32)**

<sup>11</sup>And he said, “There was a man who had two sons; <sup>12</sup>and the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of property that falls to me.’ And he divided his living between them. <sup>13</sup>Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took his journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in loose living. <sup>14</sup>And when he had spent everything, a great famine arose in that country, and he began to be in want. <sup>15</sup>So he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed swine. <sup>16</sup>And he would gladly have fed on the pods that the swine ate; and no one gave him anything. <sup>17</sup>But when he came to himself he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have bread enough and to spare, but I perish here with hunger! <sup>18</sup>I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; <sup>19</sup>I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants.”’ <sup>20</sup>And he arose and came to his father. But while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. <sup>21</sup>And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ <sup>22</sup>But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; <sup>23</sup>and bring the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and make merry; <sup>24</sup>for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to make merry.

<sup>25</sup>“Now his elder son was in the field; and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. <sup>26</sup>And he called one of the servants and asked what this meant. <sup>27</sup>And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has received him safe and sound.’ <sup>28</sup>But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, <sup>29</sup>but he answered his father, ‘Lo, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command; yet you never gave me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends. <sup>30</sup>But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your living with harlots, you killed for him the fatted calf!’ <sup>31</sup>And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. <sup>32</sup>*It was fitting to make merry and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.*’ ” (Luke 15:1-32)

### **1. Pope Francis: Mercy must be at the “Centre”**

Faced with a vision of justice as the mere observance of the law that judges people simply by dividing them into two groups – the just and sinners – Jesus is bent on revealing the great gift of mercy that searches out sinners and offers them pardon and salvation... The appeal Jesus makes to the text from the book of the prophet Hosea – “I desire love and not sacrifice” (6:6) – is important in this regard. Jesus affirms that, from that time onward, the rule of life for his disciples must place mercy at the centre, as Jesus himself demonstrated by sharing meals with sinners. Mercy, once again, is revealed as a fundamental aspect of Jesus’ mission. This is truly challenging to his hearers, who would draw the line at a formal respect for the law. Jesus, on the other hand, goes beyond the law; the company he keeps with those the law considers sinners makes us realize the depth of his mercy. (Pope Francis, *The Face of Mercy*, no. 20)

### **2. Pope Francis: The Parables of Mercy are the “Core of the Gospel”**

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. We know these parables well, three in particular: the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the father with two sons (cf. *Lk* 15:1-32). In these parables, God is always presented as full of joy, especially when he pardons. *In them we find the core of the Gospel and of our faith*, because mercy is presented as a force that overcomes everything, filling the heart with love and bringing consolation through pardon. (Pope Francis, *The Face of Mercy*, no. 8)

### **3. Pope Francis on Reconciliation: Confessors are the Father in the Prodigal Son**

The initiative of “*24 Hours for the Lord*,” to be celebrated on the Friday and Saturday preceding the Fourth Week of Lent, should be implemented in every diocese. So many people, including young people, are returning to the Sacrament of Reconciliation; through this experience they are rediscovering a path back to the Lord, living a moment of intense prayer and finding meaning in their lives. Let us place the Sacrament of Reconciliation at the centre once more in such a way that it will enable people to touch the grandeur of God’s mercy with their own hands. For every penitent, it will be a source of true interior peace.

I will never tire of insisting that confessors be authentic signs of the Father’s mercy. We do not become good confessors automatically. We become good confessors when, above all, we allow ourselves to be penitents in search of his mercy. Let us never forget that to be confessors means to participate in the very mission of Jesus to be a concrete sign of the constancy of divine love that pardons and saves. We priests have received the gift of the Holy Spirit for the forgiveness of sins, and we are responsible for this. None of us wields power over this Sacrament; rather, we are faithful servants of God’s mercy through it. *Every confessor must accept the faithful as the father in the parable of the prodigal son: a father who runs out to meet his son despite the fact that he has squandered away his inheritance.* Confessors are called to embrace the repentant son who comes back home and to express the joy of having him back again. Let us never tire of also going out to the other son who stands outside, incapable of rejoicing, in order to explain to him that his judgement is severe and unjust and meaningless in light of the father’s boundless mercy. *May confessors not ask useless questions, but like the father in*

*the parable, interrupt the speech prepared ahead of time by the prodigal son, so that confessors will learn to accept the plea for help and mercy pouring from the heart of every penitent.* In short, confessors are called to be a sign of the primacy of mercy always, everywhere, and in every situation, no matter what. (Pope Francis, *The Face of Mercy*, no. 17)

#### **4. Pope Francis on “Not Judging”**

The Lord Jesus shows us the steps of the pilgrimage to attain our goal: “Judge not, and you will not be judged...” (*Lk 6:37-38*). The Lord asks us above all *not to judge* and *not to condemn*. If anyone wishes to avoid God’s judgement, he should not make himself the judge of his brother or sister. Human beings, whenever they judge, look no farther than the surface, whereas the Father looks into the very depths of the soul. How much harm words do when they are motivated by feelings of jealousy and envy! To speak ill of others puts them in a bad light, undermines their reputation and leaves them prey to the whims of gossip. To refrain from judgement and condemnation means, in a positive sense, to know how to accept the good in every person and to spare him any suffering that might be caused by our partial judgment, our presumption to know everything about him. But this is still not sufficient to express mercy. Jesus asks us also to *forgive* and to *give*. To be instruments of mercy because it was we who first received mercy from God. To be generous with others, knowing that God showers his goodness upon us with immense generosity. *Merciful like the Father*, therefore, is the “motto” of this Holy Year. (Pope Francis, *The Face of Mercy*, no. 14)

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