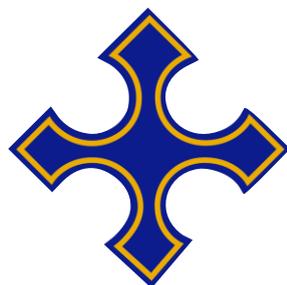




God's Mercy

Our Mission



Prayer & Reflection Programme
by the Diocese of Arundel & Brighton

Prayer of Pope Francis for the Jubilee Year of Mercy

Lord Jesus Christ,
you have taught us to be merciful like the heavenly Father,
and have told us that whoever sees you sees Him.
Show us your face and we will be saved.
Your loving gaze freed Zacchaeus and Matthew
from being enslaved by money;
the adulteress and Magdalene
from seeking happiness only in created things;
made Peter weep after his betrayal,
and assured Paradise to the repentant thief.
Let us hear, as if addressed to each one of us,
the words that you spoke to the Samaritan woman:
“If you knew the gift of God!”

You are the visible face of the invisible Father,
of the God who manifests his power
above all by forgiveness and mercy:
let the Church be your visible face in the world,
its Lord risen and glorified.
You willed that your ministers would also be clothed in weakness
in order that they may feel compassion
for those in ignorance and error:
let everyone who approaches them
feel sought after, loved, and forgiven by God.

Send your Spirit and consecrate every one of us with its anointing,
so that the Jubilee of Mercy may be a year of grace from the Lord,
and your Church, with renewed enthusiasm,
may bring good news to the poor,
proclaim liberty to captives and the oppressed,
and restore sight to the blind.

We ask this of you, Lord Jesus,
through the intercession of Mary, Mother of Mercy;
you who live and reign
with the Father and the Holy Spirit for ever and ever.
Amen

Introduction

The format for this year's Lent prayer and reflection programme is inspired by the Year of Mercy running from 8 December 2015 until 20th November 2016. As the focus of the programme is not lectionary based it can be used flexibly during or after the season of Lent.

Each week we will reflect on a different aspect of Mercy, using a mixture of Scripture, Church teaching and prayer.

Week 1: Why Has Pope Francis Called For A Year of Mercy?

Week 2: Why Does Everyone Need God's Mercy?

Week 3: How Do We Receive God's Mercy?

Week 4: Our Mission - Corporal Works of Mercy

Week 5: Our Mission - Spiritual Works of Mercy

The format of the session draws on Bishop Richard's call for Prayer, Formation and Mission. The session will begin and conclude with prayer and use for reflection an appropriate Psalm and Gospel, the formation on the topic is largely taken from the writing and speeches of Pope Francis, with an encouragement to use all of this as a basis for Mission in our lives.

The booklet is written primarily for group use, but there is no reason why these should not be used for private reflection. The format each week is:

- | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| A. Opening Prayer | - Using the Year of Mercy Prayer |
| B. Psalm | - Psalm of Mercy |
| C. Formation | - Reflection on Mercy |
| D. Gospel | - With reflection |
| E. Closing Prayer | - Intercessions and suggested Prayer |

Please feel free to adapt the material to your needs and tastes.

Feedback from previous years shows that groups usually profit by adapting the booklet to suit their own situation. This can be done in a variety of ways, for example, by including a hymn, or additional prayers.

For further advice on how best to use the material, contact David Wills.

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Front Cover

The image used on the front cover is Caravaggio's *The Calling of Saint Matthew*, which Pope Francis has often referred to as an illustration of God's merciful gaze.

I do not know Rome well. I know a few things. These include the Basilica of St. Mary Major; I always used to go there. I know St. Mary Major, St. Peter's...but when I had to come to Rome, I always stayed in [the neighbourhood of] Via della Scrofa. From there I often visited the Church of St. Louis of France, and I went there to contemplate the painting of 'The Calling of St. Matthew,' by Caravaggio.

"That finger of Jesus, pointing at Matthew. That's me. I feel like him. Like Matthew." Here the pope becomes determined, as if he had finally found the image he was looking for: "It is the gesture of Matthew that strikes me: he holds on to his money as if to say, 'No, not me! No, this money is mine.' Here, this is me, a sinner on whom the Lord has turned his gaze. And this is what I said when they asked me if I would accept my election as pontiff."

Then the pope whispers in Latin: "I am a sinner, but I trust in the infinite mercy and patience of our Lord Jesus Christ, and I accept in a spirit of penance."

Pope Francis with Antonio Spadaro, My Door is Always Open, Bloomsbury, 2014

The calling of Matthew is also presented within the context of mercy. Passing by the tax collector's booth, Jesus looked intently at Matthew. It was a look full of mercy that forgave the sins of that man, a sinner and a tax collector, whom Jesus chose – against the hesitation of the disciples – to become one of the Twelve. Saint Bede the Venerable, commenting on this Gospel passage, wrote that Jesus looked upon Matthew with merciful love and chose him: *miserando atque eligendo*. This expression impressed me so much that I chose it for my episcopal motto.

Pope Francis, Misericordiae Vultus (MV) 8

Week 1 - Why has Pope Francis called for a Year of Mercy?

A. Welcome and Opening Prayer

After a few moments of silence we suggest you use the Year of Mercy Prayer found on the inside cover of this booklet.

Gathering - Where have I given/received mercy in my own life?

B. Psalm 25 (24)

Pray this Psalm aloud, taking turns to read each stanza and then take 2-3 minutes to reflect in silence on how this Psalm speaks to you of God's mercy. Your group may wish to share these insights.

Make me to know your ways, O LORD;
teach me your paths.

Lead me in your truth, and teach me,
for you are the God of my salvation;
for you I wait all day long.

Be mindful of your mercy, O LORD, and of your steadfast love,
for they have been from of old.

Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions;
according to your steadfast love remember me,
for your goodness' sake, O LORD!

Good and upright is the LORD;
therefore he instructs sinners in the way.

He leads the humble in what is right,
and teaches the humble his way.

All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness,
for those who keep his covenant and his decrees.

For your name's sake, O LORD,
pardon my guilt, for it is great.

Who are they that fear the LORD?

He will teach them the way that they should choose.

They will abide in prosperity,
and their children shall possess the land.

The friendship of the LORD is for those who fear him,
and he makes his covenant known to them.

My eyes are ever toward the LORD,
for he will pluck my feet out of the net.

Turn to me and be gracious to me,
for I am lonely and afflicted.
Relieve the troubles of my heart,
and bring me out of my distress.
Consider my affliction and my trouble,
and forgive all my sins.

C. Formation on Mercy

Pope Francis, General Audience, 9 December 2015

Today, I would like to reflect together with you on the meaning of this Holy Year, responding to the question: *Why a Jubilee of Mercy?*

To turn one's look to God, our Merciful Father, and to brothers in need of mercy, means to focus our attention on the *essential content of the Gospel*: Jesus, Mercy made flesh, which renders visible to our eyes the great mystery of the Trinitarian Love of God. To celebrate a Jubilee of Mercy means to put again at the centre of our personal life and of that of our communities what is specific to the Christian faith, namely Jesus Christ, the merciful God.

Therefore, a Holy Year to *live mercy*. Yes, dear brothers and sisters, this Holy Year is offered to us to experience in our life the sweet and gentle touch of the forgiveness of God, his presence at our side and His closeness especially in moments of greatest need.

Therefore, this Jubilee is a privileged moment for the Church to learn to choose only "*what pleases God most.*" And, what is it that '*pleases God most*'? To forgive His children, to have mercy on them, so that they also, in turn, can forgive their brothers, shining as torches of God's mercy in the world. This is what pleases God most. In a book that he wrote on Adam, Saint Ambrose takes up the history of the creation of the world and says that every day, after having made something, — the moon, the sun or the animals — "God saw that this was good." However, when he made man and woman, the Bible says: "He saw that this was very good." Saint Ambrose wonders: "But why does He say "very good"? Why is God so happy after the creation of man and woman? Because, finally, He had someone to forgive. This is beautiful: God's joy is to forgive; God's being is mercy. Therefore, in this year, we must open our hearts so that this love, this joy of God fills all of us with this mercy.

Dear brothers and sisters, I hope that, in this Holy Year, each one of us will experience God's mercy, to be witnesses of "*what pleases Him most.*"

Time to reflect and share thoughts on the above

D. Gospel (Luke 18:23-35)

“In order to be capable of mercy, therefore, we must first of all dispose ourselves to listen to the Word of God.” (Pope Francis)

Proclaim the Gospel aloud, and then take 2-3 minutes to reflect in silence on what you have heard. Open yourself to listen to and hear the Word of God. Ask God to open your heart to receive His words.

This story throws light on the kingdom of Heaven: A king decided to settle accounts with his servants. Among the first of them was one who owed him ten thousand pieces of gold. As the man could not repay the debt, the king commanded that he be sold as a slave with his wife, his children and all his goods, as repayment. The servant threw himself at the feet of the king and said, ‘Give me time, and I will pay you back everything.’ The king took pity on him, and not only set him free, but even cancelled his debt.

When this servant left the king’s presence, he met one of his fellow servants, who owed him a hundred pieces of silver. He grabbed him by the throat and almost choked him, shouting, ‘Pay me what you owe!’ His fellow servant threw himself at his feet and begged him, ‘Give me time, and I will pay everything.’ But the other did not agree, and sent him to prison until he had paid all his debt. Now the servants of the king saw what had happened. They were extremely upset, and so they went and reported everything to their lord.

Then the lord summoned his servant and said, ‘Wicked servant, I forgave you all that you owed me when you begged me to do so. Weren’t you bound to have pity on your fellow servant, as I had pity on you?’ The lord was now angry. He handed the wicked servant over to be punished, until he had paid the whole debt.” Jesus added, “So will my heavenly Father do with you, unless you sincerely forgive your brothers and sisters.”

Reflection

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.

From another parable, we cull an important teaching for our Christian lives. In reply to Peter's question about how many times it is necessary to forgive, Jesus says: "I do not say seven times, but seventy times seven times" (Mt 18:22). He then goes on to tell the parable of the "ruthless servant," who, called by his master to return a huge amount, begs him on his knees for mercy. His master cancels his debt. But he then meets a fellow servant who owes him a few cents and who in turn begs on his knees for mercy, but the first servant refuses his request and throws him into jail. When the master hears of the matter, he becomes infuriated and, summoning the first servant back to him, says, "Should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?" (Mt 18:33). Jesus concludes, "So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart" (Mt 18:35).

This parable contains a profound teaching for all of us. Jesus affirms that mercy is not only an action of the Father, it becomes a criterion for ascertaining who his true children are. In short, we are called to show mercy because mercy has first been shown to us. Pardoning offences becomes the clearest expression of merciful love, and for us Christians it is an imperative from which we cannot excuse ourselves. At times how hard it seems to forgive! And yet pardon is the instrument placed into our fragile hands to attain serenity of heart. To let go of anger, wrath, violence, and revenge are necessary conditions to living joyfully. Let us therefore heed the Apostle's exhortation: "Do not let the sun go down on your anger" (Eph 4:26). Above all, let us listen to the words of Jesus who made mercy an ideal of life and a criterion for the credibility of our faith: "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy" (Mt 5:7): the beatitude to which we should particularly aspire in this Holy Year

Pope Francis (Papal Bull on Year of Mercy - MV 9)

Discuss what this passage reveals to you about God's mercy.

Mission of Mercy

Come up with one concrete way to incorporate any insights gained during this session into your daily actions or prayer life.

E. Concluding Prayer:

Spend a few minutes praying for the intentions of the group and the world, and conclude with the prayer found on the inside back page.

Week 2: Why does everyone need God's mercy?

A. Welcome and Opening Prayer:

After a few moments of silence we suggest you use the Year of Mercy Prayer found on the inside cover of this booklet.

Gathering - Were there any fruits from last week's Mission of Mercy?

B. Psalm 57 (56)

Pray this Psalm aloud, taking turns to read each stanza and then take 2-3 minutes to reflect in silence on how this Psalm speaks to you of God's mercy. Your group may wish to share these insights.

Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me,
for in you my soul takes refuge;
in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge,
until the destroying storms pass by.

I cry to God Most High,
to God who fulfills his purpose for me.
He will send from heaven and save me,
he will put to shame those who trample on me.
God will send forth his steadfast love and his faithfulness.

I lie down among lions
that greedily devour human prey;
their teeth are spears and arrows,
their tongues sharp swords.

Be exalted, O God, above the heavens.
Let your glory be over all the earth.

They set a net for my steps;
my soul was bowed down.
They dug a pit in my path,
but they have fallen into it themselves.
My heart is steadfast, O God,
my heart is steadfast.
I will sing and make melody.
Awake, my soul!
Awake, O harp and lyre!
I will awake the dawn.
I will give thanks to you, O Lord, among the peoples;

C. Formation on Mercy

Pope Francis, from 'The Name of God is Mercy', Chapter 6

Mercy exists, but if you don't want to receive it ... If you don't recognise yourself as a sinner it means you don't want to receive it; it means that you don't feel the need for it. Sometimes it is hard to know exactly what happened. Sometimes you might feel sceptical and think it is impossible to get back on your feet again. Or maybe you prefer your wounds, the wounds of sin, and you behave like a dog, licking your wounds with your tongue. This is a narcissistic illness that makes people bitter. There is pleasure in feeling bitter, an unhealthy pleasure. If we do not begin by examining our wretchedness, if we stay lost and despair that we will never be forgiven, we end up licking our wounds and they stay open and never heal. Instead, there is medicine, there is healing, we only need take a small step toward God, or at least express the desire to take it. A tiny opening is enough. All we need to do is take our condition seriously.

.... The more conscious we are of our wretchedness and our sins, the more we experience the love and infinite mercy of God among us, and the more capable we are of looking upon the many "wounded" we meet along the way with acceptance and mercy. So we must avoid the attitude of someone who judges and condemns from the lofty heights of his own certainty, looking for the splinter in his brother's eye while remaining unaware of the beam in his own. Let us always remember that God rejoices more when one sinner returns to the fold than when ninety-nine righteous people have no need of repentance. When a person begins to recognize the sickness in their soul, when the Holy Spirit—the Grace of God—acts within them and moves their heart toward an initial recognition of their own sins, he needs to find an open door, not a closed one. He needs to find acceptance, not judgment, prejudice, or condemnation. He needs to be helped, not pushed away or cast out. Sometimes, when Christians think like scholars of the law, their hearts extinguish that which the Holy Spirit lights up in the heart of a sinner when he stands at the threshold, when he starts to feel nostalgia for God.

Time to reflect and share thoughts on the above

D. Gospel (John 4:5-30)

In order to be capable of mercy, therefore, we must first of all dispose ourselves to listen to the Word of God." (Pope Francis)

Proclaim the Gospel aloud, and then take 2-3 minutes to reflect in silence on what you have heard. Open yourself to listen to and hear the Word of God. Ask God to open your heart to receive His words.

Jesus came to a Samaritan town called Sychar, near the land that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well is there. Tired from his journey, Jesus sat down by the well; it was about noon.

Now a Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." His disciples had just gone into town to buy some food. The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan and a woman, for a drink?" (For Jews, in fact, have no dealings with Samaritans.) Jesus replied, "If you only knew the gift of God! If you knew who it is, who is asking you for a drink, you yourself would have asked me, and I would have given you living water."

The woman answered, "Sir, you have no bucket, and this well is deep; where is your living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us this well; he drank from it himself, together with his sons and his cattle?" Jesus said to her, "Those who drink of this water will be thirsty again; but those, who drink of the water that I shall give, will never be thirsty; for the water, that I shall give, will become in them a spring of water, welling up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Give me this water, that I may never be thirsty, and never have to come here to draw water."

Jesus said, "Go, call your husband, and come back here." The woman answered, "I have no husband." And Jesus replied, "You are right to say, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you said is true." The woman then said to him, "I see you are a prophet; tell me this: Our ancestors came to this mountain to worship God; but you Jews, do you not claim that Jerusalem is the only place to worship God?" Jesus said to her, "Believe me, woman, the hour is coming when you shall worship the Father, but that will not be on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, because salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is even now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth; for that is the kind of worshippers the Father wants. God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship in Spirit, and truth." The woman said to him, "I know that the Messiah (that is the Christ) is coming. When he comes, he will tell us everything." And Jesus said, "I who am talking to you, I am he."

At this point the disciples returned, and were surprised that Jesus was speaking with a woman; however, no one said, "What do you want?" or, "Why are you talking with her?" So the woman left her water jar and ran to the town. There she said to the people, "Come and see a man who told me everything I did! Could he not be the Christ?" So they left the town and went to meet him.

Reflection

Is there mercy for us sinners too? Yes, there is, absolutely and inexhaustibly. But there are two prerequisites: truthfulness and repentance.

...One of the most helpful examples of the inseparable correlation of mercy and truthfulness is the story of Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well.

...Jesus demands the truth of this woman, and what an effect it has! She used to be isolated and had to draw water in the noonday heat, but suddenly she is right in the middle of the townspeople. What formerly separated her from her neighbours now brings her back to them. Her scandalous life was the topic of general gossip, but now she herself comes and says: There is a man here who told me all that I ever did. Gossip had isolated her, the truth restores communication. What she had been ashamed of she can now admit publicly. Everyone knew it and despised her. He says it to her without despising her. Because he respects and loves her as a person, he does not identify her with her guilt.

In calling her predicament by name, he does not condemn her but rather reveals in his mercy that she was seeking in all those relationships something other than what she found in them. "I have no husband" – in this statement I hear deep pain. She has belonged to many men but has had no husband. Not one of them really loved her. "I have no husband" – what a disturbing statement by that woman, whom Jesus treats so differently from the way all the other men before have done. In Jesus she has found him, the man who does not want something from her but, rather, wants *her*; who does not condemn her but does not withhold from her, either, the truth that makes her free.

The sinful woman becomes a missionary. All the inhabitants of the place go out to Jesus. After meeting him, they tell her: "It is no longer because of your words that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world" (John 4:42). See what truth can accomplish as the expression of mercy!

Pope Francis, from 'The Name of God is Mercy', Chapter 4

Discuss what this passage reveals to you about God's mercy.

Mission of Mercy

Come up with one concrete way to incorporate any insights gained during this session into your daily actions or prayer life.

E. Concluding Prayer:

Spend a few minutes praying for the intentions of the group and the world, and conclude with the prayer found on the inside back page.

Week Three: How do we receive God's Mercy?

A. Welcome and Opening Prayer:

After a few moments of silence we suggest you use the Year of Mercy Prayer found on the inside cover of this booklet.

Gathering - Were there any fruits from last week's Mission of Mercy?

B. Psalm 51 (50)

Pray this Psalm aloud, taking turns to read each stanza and then take 2-3 minutes to reflect in silence on how this Psalm speaks to you of God's mercy. Your group may wish to share these insights.

Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.

Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin.
For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.

Against you, you alone, have I sinned,
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you are justified in your sentence
and blameless when you pass judgment.

Indeed, I was born guilty,
a sinner when my mother conceived me.
You desire truth in the inward being;
therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.

Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.
Hide your face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.
Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.

Do not cast me away from your presence,
and do not take your holy spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain in me a willing spirit.

Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
and sinners will return to you.
Deliver me from bloodshed, O God,
O God of my salvation,
and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance.

C. Formation on Mercy

Pope Francis, from 'The Name of God is Mercy', Chapter 2

Why is it important to go to confession? You were the first Pope to give confession publicly during the penitential liturgy, in St. Peter's . . . Isn't it enough to repent and ask for forgiveness on one's own, and sort things out with God on one's own?

Jesus said to his apostles: "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness of any, it is withheld" (John 20:19–23). Therefore, the apostles and all their successors—the bishops and their colleagues the priests—become instruments of the mercy of God. They act in persona Christi. This is very beautiful. It has deep significance because we are social beings. If you are not capable of talking to your brother about your mistakes, you can be sure that you can't talk about them with God, either, and therefore you end up confessing into the mirror, to yourself. We are social beings, and forgiveness has a social implication; my sin wounds mankind, my brothers and sisters, society as a whole. Confessing to a priest is a way of putting my life into the hands and heart of someone else, someone who in that moment acts in the name of Jesus. It's a way to be real and authentic: we face the facts by looking at another person and not in the mirror. Saint Ignatius, before changing his life and understanding that he had to become a soldier of Christ, fought in the Battle of Pamplona. He was a soldier in the army of the king of Spain, the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, and he confronted the French army. He was seriously wounded and thought he was going to die. There was no priest on the battlefield. So he called a comrade in arms and confessed to him; he told him his sins. Being a lay person, the soldier could not absolve him, but the need to face another person and confess was so strong that he decided to do it like that. It is a beautiful lesson. It is true that I can talk to the Lord and ask him for forgiveness, implore him. And the Lord will forgive me immediately. But it is important that I go to confession, that I sit in front of a priest who embodies Jesus, that I kneel before Mother Church, called to dispense the mercy of Christ. There is objectivity in this gesture of genuflection before the priest; it becomes the vehicle through which grace reaches and heals me.

Time to reflect and share thoughts on the above

D. Gospel (Luke 15: 11-32)

In order to be capable of mercy, therefore, we must first of all dispose ourselves to listen to the Word of God.” (Pope Francis)

Proclaim the Gospel aloud, and then take 2-3 minutes to reflect in silence on what you have heard. Open yourself to listen to and hear the Word of God. Ask God to open your heart to receive His words.

Jesus continued, “There was a man with two sons. The younger said to his father: ‘Give me my share of the estate.’ So the father divided his property between them.

Some days later, the younger son gathered all his belongings and started off for a distant land where he squandered his wealth in loose living. Having spent everything, he was hard pressed when a severe famine broke out in that land. So he hired himself out to a well-to-do citizen of that place and was sent to work on a pig farm. So famished was he that he longed to fill his stomach even with the food given to the pigs, but no one offered him anything.

Finally coming to his senses, he said: ‘How many of my father’s hired workers have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will get up and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against God and before you. I no longer deserve to be called your son. Treat me then as one of your hired servants.’ With that thought in mind he set off for his father’s house.

He was still a long way off when his father caught sight of him. His father was so deeply moved with compassion that he ran out to meet him, threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. The son said: ‘Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before you. I no longer deserve to be called your son...’

But the father turned to his servants: ‘Quick! Bring out the finest robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Take the fattened calf and kill it. We shall celebrate and have a feast, for this son of mine was dead and has come back to life. He was lost and is found.’ And the celebration began.

Meanwhile, the elder son had been working in the fields. As he returned and was near the house, he heard the sound of music and dancing. He called one of the servants and asked what it was all about. The servant answered: 'Your brother has come home safe and sound, and your father is so happy about it that he has ordered this celebration and killed the fattened calf.'

The elder son became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and pleaded with him. The indignant son said: 'Look, I have slaved for you all these years. Never have I disobeyed your orders. Yet you have never given me even a young goat to celebrate with my friends. Then when this son of yours returns after squandering your property with loose women, you kill the fattened calf for him.'

The father said: 'My son, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But this brother of yours was dead, and has come back to life. He was lost and is found. And for that we had to rejoice and be glad.'

Reflection

Let's look at that word *mercy*. Some define it "undeserved favour", or 'kindness that is much more than expected', as in the parable of the Prodigal Son which Jesus used to describe the *mercy* of our Father God (Luke 15:11-32). In the parable, the younger brother goes off with his inheritance and squanders it, while his elder brother remains home and behaves himself - so why would *he* have any need of his father's mercy?

The elder brother in the parable is described as a dutiful son who ticked all the right boxes. He did everything he was told, but we see in his words an underlying resentment as well as an attitude of self-righteousness: he thought he should be rewarded for doing the right thing! He might as well have said to his father, "You owe me!"

"Look, all these years I have slaved for you and never once disobeyed your orders, yet you never so much as offered me a young goat for me to celebrate with my friends" (Lk 15:29).

The difference between the son who sinned grievously and his elder brother is key. The younger son *knew his father's character* - he knew his father was a 'just' man: he had only to look at how fairly his father treated his paid servants. So when he repented of his sins he decided to ask forgiveness of his father, acknowledging he had not behaved as a son and only deserved to be treated as a servant.

The elder son may have remained at home working for his father, but he didn't really *know* his father at all. When he heard the music and dancing as he drew

near the family home and asked a servant what it was all about, he was told that his father was throwing a party for his long-lost brother. He was shocked and angry. However, if he had really *known* his father, wouldn't he have instead replied: "Typical Dad!" Clearly he had no relationship with his father at all, nor did he love his own brother. Connect this parable to our relationship with our Father God, still keeping *mercy* in mind. We read in the catechism that we are made to *know and love* God. Do we actually *know* him; do we seek a relationship with him? Do we love him '*with our whole heart, our whole mind and our whole strength*'?

Barbara Mason

Discuss what this passage reveals to you about God's mercy.

Mission of Mercy

Come up with one concrete way to incorporate any insights gained during this session into your daily actions or prayer life.

E. Concluding Prayer:

Spend a few minutes praying for the intentions of the group and the world, and conclude with the prayer found on the inside back page.

Week Four: Corporal Works of Mercy

A. Welcome and Opening Prayer:

After a few moments of silence we suggest you use the Year of Mercy Prayer found on the inside cover of this booklet.

Gathering - Were there any fruits from last week's Mission of Mercy?

B. Psalm 41 (40)

Pray this Psalm aloud, taking turns to read each stanza and then take 2-3 minutes to reflect in silence on how this Psalm speaks to you of God's mercy. Your group may wish to share these insights.

Happy are those who consider the poor;
the LORD delivers them in the day of trouble.
The LORD protects them and keeps them alive;
they are called happy in the land.
You do not give them up to the will of their enemies.
The LORD sustains them on their sickbed;
in their illness you heal all their infirmities.

As for me, I said, "O LORD, be gracious to me;
heal me, for I have sinned against you."
My enemies wonder in malice
when I will die, and my name perish.
And when they come to see me, they utter empty words,
while their hearts gather mischief;
when they go out, they tell it abroad.
All who hate me whisper together about me;
they imagine the worst for me.

They think that a deadly thing has fastened on me,
that I will not rise again from where I lie.
Even my bosom friend in whom I trusted,
who ate of my bread, has lifted the heel against me.
But you, O LORD, be gracious to me,
and raise me up, that I may repay them.

By this I know that you are pleased with me;
because my enemy has not triumphed over me.
But you have upheld me because of my integrity,
and set me in your presence forever.

Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel,
from everlasting to everlasting.
Amen and Amen.

C. Formation on Mercy

From a Sermon by Saint Caesarius of Arles, bishop

Divine and human mercy

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. My brothers and sisters, sweet is the thought of mercy, but even more so is mercy itself. It is what all men hope for, but unfortunately, not what all men deserve. For while all men wish to receive it, only a few are willing to give it.

How can a man ask for himself what he refuses to give to another? If he expects to receive any mercy in heaven, he should give mercy on earth. Do we all desire to receive mercy? Let us make mercy our patroness now, and she will free us in the world to come. Yes, there is mercy in heaven, but the road to it is paved by our merciful acts on earth. As Scripture says: Lord, your mercy is in heaven.

There is, therefore, an earthly as well as heavenly mercy, that is to say, a human and a divine mercy. Human mercy has compassion on the miseries of the poor. Divine mercy grants forgiveness of sins. Whatever human mercy bestows here on earth, divine mercy will return to us in our homeland. In this life God feels cold and hunger in all who are stricken with poverty; for, remember, he once said: What you have done to the least of my brothers you have done to me. Yes, God who sees fit to give his mercy in heaven wishes it to be a reality here on earth.

What kind of people are we? When God gives, we wish to receive, but when he begs, we refuse to give. Remember, it was Christ who said: I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat. When the poor are starving, Christ too hungers. Do not neglect to improve the unhappy conditions of the poor, if you wish to ensure that your own sins be forgiven you. Christ hungers now, my brethren; it is he who deigns to hunger and thirst in the persons of the poor. And what he will return in heaven tomorrow is what he receives here on earth today.

Time to reflect and share thoughts on the above

D. Gospel (Luke 7:1-10)

In order to be capable of mercy, therefore, we must first of all dispose ourselves to listen to the Word of God.” (Pope Francis)

Proclaim the Gospel aloud, and then take 2-3 minutes to reflect in silence on what you have heard. Open yourself to listen to and hear the Word of God. Ask God to open your heart to receive His words.

When Jesus had finished teaching in this way to the people, he went to Capernaum.

There was a captain whose servant was very sick and near to death, a man very dear to him. So when he heard about Jesus, he sent some elders of the Jews to persuade him to come and save his servant's life. The elders came to Jesus and begged him earnestly, saying, "He deserves this of you, for he loves our people and even built a synagogue for us."

Jesus went with them. He was not far from the house when the captain sent friends to give this message, "Sir, do not trouble yourself for I am not worthy to welcome you under my roof. You see I didn't approach you myself. Just give the order and my servant will be healed. For I myself, a junior officer, give orders to my soldiers and I say to this one: 'Go,' and he goes; and to the other: 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant: 'Do this,' and he does it."

On hearing these words, Jesus was filled with admiration. He turned and said to the people with him, "I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such great faith." The people sent by the captain went back to his house; there they found that the servant was well.

Reflection

In this Gospel reading we see a man from outside the Jewish Tradition who is drawn to Jesus. He had heard about – not met, only heard about, Jesus - but he acts immediately. He asked that Jesus heal his slave. However, before Jesus had even reached the house, the Centurion had sent people out to meet Jesus to inform him that he need not come as far as the house itself, just a word of healing from a distance would be enough to restore the slave's health.

Here we have a man steeped in the rules and regulations of his world, and yet, when he heard of Jesus he put aside all the protocol of his rank and nationality and asked Jesus to have mercy, and not just for himself (an outsider in Jesus' world) but for his slave (the outsider's outsider!).

What strikes me is the speed of the Centurion's conversion; he hears, he believes, he acts and the slave lives.

This has echoes for me about how we sometimes become slaves to our own rules and protocols in the Church. Jesus did not check the credentials of the

Centurion before he showed mercy to him and healed his slave, neither did the Centurion examine in great length the background of Jesus, he heard and believed.

It is hard to trust in God, I know many people who have been Catholics all their lives, who seem very afraid of aspects of their lives, particularly illness and death. I know it is hard to ask for mercy from God, I find it very hard to go to confession – I always feel that I need to ‘tidy up my soul’ before letting God in.

I love the Centurion because, despite all his instincts and experience, he goes out on a limb for the love of a mere slave. Disregarding his status and position he brings himself low to ask the help of this foreign preacher and healer whom he hasn’t even met! He encounters Jesus, he believes and he acts. His act of asking for Jesus’ help shows us beautifully and powerfully what is possible when we act and Jesus responds. May we learn to hear, to believe and to act, so that we too may experience the power of Jesus in our lives and the lives of those around us.

Katherine Dunkley

Discuss what this passage reveals to you about God's mercy.

Mission of Mercy

Come up with one concrete way to incorporate any insights gained during this session into your daily actions or prayer life.

E. Concluding Prayer:

Spend a few minutes praying for the intentions of the group and the world, and conclude with the prayer found on the inside back page.

THE THREE DEGREES OF MERCY.

THE FIRST: THE ACT OF MERCY, OF WHATEVER KIND.

**THE SECOND: THE WORD OF MERCY
– IF I CANNOT CARRY OUT A WORK OF MERCY,
I WILL ASSIST BY MY WORDS.**

**THE THIRD: PRAYER
– IF I CANNOT SHOW MERCY BY DEEDS OR WORDS,
I CAN ALWAYS DO SO BY PRAYER.
MY PRAYER REACHES OUT EVEN THERE
WHERE I CANNOT REACH OUT PHYSICALLY.**

St Maria Faustina Kowalska

Week Five: Spiritual Works of Mercy

A. Welcome and Opening Prayer:

After a few moments of silence we suggest you use the Year of Mercy Prayer found on the inside cover of this booklet.

Gathering - Were there any fruits from last week's Mission of Mercy?

B. Psalm 103

Pray this Psalm aloud, taking turns to read each stanza and then take 2-3 minutes to reflect in silence on how this Psalm speaks to you of God's mercy. Your group may wish to share these insights.

Bless the LORD, O my soul,
and do not forget all his benefits
who forgives all your iniquity,
who heals all your diseases,
who redeems your life from the Pit,
who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,
who satisfies you with good as long as you live
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

The LORD works vindication
and justice for all who are oppressed.
He made known his ways to Moses,
his acts to the people of Israel.
The LORD is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

He will not always accuse,
nor will he keep his anger forever.
He does not deal with us according to our sins,
nor repay us according to our iniquities.

For as the heavens are high above the earth,
so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;
as far as the east is from the west,
so far he removes our transgressions from us.
As a father has compassion for his children,
so the LORD has compassion for those who fear him.
For he knows how we were made;
he remembers that we are dust.

C. Formation on Mercy

Pope Benedict XVI, Message for Lent 2012

Today, in general, we are very sensitive to the idea of charity and caring about the physical and material well-being of others, but almost completely silent about our spiritual responsibility towards our brothers and sisters. This was not the case in the early Church or in those communities that are truly mature in faith, those which are concerned not only for the physical health of their brothers and sisters, but also for their spiritual health and ultimate destiny.

The Scriptures tell us: "Rebuke the wise and he will love you for it. Be open with the wise, he grows wiser still, teach the upright, he will gain yet more" (Proverbs 9:8ff). Christ himself commands us to admonish a brother who is committing a sin (cf. Mt 18:15).

The Church's tradition has included "admonishing sinners" among the spiritual works of mercy. It is important to recover this dimension of Christian charity. We must not remain silent before evil. I am thinking of all those Christians who, out of human regard or purely personal convenience, adapt to the prevailing mentality, rather than warning their brothers and sisters against ways of thinking and acting that are contrary to the truth and that do not follow the path of goodness. Christian admonishment, for its part, is never motivated by a spirit of accusation or recrimination. It is always moved by love and mercy, and springs from genuine concern for the good of the other.

As the Apostle Paul says: "If one of you is caught doing something wrong, those of you who are spiritual should set that person right in a spirit of gentleness; and watch yourselves that you are not put to the test in the same way" (Gal 6:1). In a world pervaded by individualism, it is essential to rediscover the importance of fraternal correction, so that together we may journey towards holiness. Scripture tells us that even "the upright falls seven times" (Proverbs 24:16); all of us are weak and imperfect (cf. 1 Jn 1:8). It is a great service, then, to help others and allow them to help us, so that we can be open to the whole truth about ourselves, improve our lives and walk more uprightly in the Lord's ways. There will always be a need for a gaze which loves and admonishes, which knows and understands, which discerns and forgives (cf. Lk 22:61), as God has done and continues to do with each of us.

Time to reflect and share thoughts on the above

D. Gospel (Luke 7:36-50)

In order to be capable of mercy, therefore, we must first of all dispose ourselves to listen to the Word of God." (Pope Francis)

Proclaim the Gospel aloud, and then take 2-3 minutes to reflect in silence on what you have heard. Open yourself to listen to and hear the Word of God. Ask God to open your heart to receive His words.

One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to share his meal, so he went to the Pharisee's home and as usual reclined on the sofa to eat. And it happened that a woman of this town, who was known as a sinner, heard that he was in the Pharisee's house. She brought a precious jar of perfume and stood behind him at his feet, weeping. She wet his feet with tears, she dried them with her hair and kissed his feet and poured the perfume on them.

The Pharisee who had invited Jesus was watching and thought, "If this man were a prophet, he would know what sort of person is touching him; isn't this woman a sinner?"

Then Jesus spoke to the Pharisee and said, "Simon, I have something to ask you." He answered, "Speak, master." And Jesus said, "Two people were in debt to the same creditor. One owed him five hundred silver coins, and the other fifty. As they were unable to pay him back, he graciously canceled the debts of both. Now, which of them will love him more?"

Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, who was forgiven more." And - Jesus said, "You are right." And turning toward the woman, he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? You gave me no water for my feet when I entered your house, but she has washed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. You didn't welcome me with a kiss, but she has not stopped kissing my feet since she came in. You provided no oil for my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. This is why, I tell you, her sins, her many sins, are forgiven, because of her great love. But the one who is forgiven little, has little love."

Then Jesus said to the woman, "Your sins are forgiven." The others sitting with him at the table began to wonder, "Now this man claims to forgive sins!" But Jesus again spoke to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

Reflection

The Gospel we have heard opens to us a path of hope and comfort. It is good to feel Jesus' compassionate gaze upon us, just as it was felt by the sinful woman in the house of the Pharisee. In this passage two words persistently return: *love* and *judgment*.

There is *the love of the sinful woman* who humbles herself before the Lord; but before that is *the merciful love of Jesus* for her, which drives her to approach him. Her tears of repentance and joy wash the feet of the Master, and her hair dries them with gratitude; the kisses are an expression of her pure love; and the perfumed ointment poured in abundance attests to how precious He is in her eyes. This woman's every gesture speaks of love and expresses her desire to have unwavering certitude in her life: that of having been forgiven. And this certitude is beautiful! And Jesus gives her this certitude: in accepting her He demonstrates the love God has for her, just for her, a public sinner! Love and forgiveness are simultaneous: God forgives her many sins, He forgives her for all of them, for "she loved much" (Lk 7:47); and she adores Jesus because she feels that in Him there is mercy and not condemnation. She feels that Jesus understands her with love, she who is a sinner. Thanks to Jesus, God lifts her many sins off her shoulders, He no longer remembers them (cf. Is 43:25). For this is also true: when God forgives, He forgets. God's forgiveness is great! For her now a new era begins; through love she is reborn into a new life.

Simon, the master of the house, the Pharisee, on the contrary, *doesn't manage to find the road of love*. Everything is calculated, everything is thought out.... He stands firm on the threshold of formality. It is an unpleasant thing, formal love, he doesn't understand. He is not capable of taking that next step forward to meet Jesus who will bring him salvation. Simon limits himself to inviting Jesus to lunch, but did not truly welcome him. In his thoughts Simon invokes only justice and in doing so he errs. *His judgment of the woman distances him from the truth* and prevents him from even understanding who his guest is. He stopped at the surface — at formality — incapable of seeing the heart. Before the parable of Jesus and the question of which servant would love more, the Pharisee responds correctly: "The one, I suppose, to whom he forgave more". Jesus doesn't fail to observe: "You have judged rightly" (Lk 7:43). When Simon's judgment is turned to love, then is he in the right.

Pope Francis, Announcement of the Jubilee of Mercy, 13 March 2015

Discuss what this passage reveals to you about God's mercy.

Mission of Mercy

Come up with one concrete way to incorporate any insights gained during this session into your daily actions or prayer life.

E. Concluding Prayer:

Spend a few minutes praying for the intentions of the group and the world, and then pray together using the prayer found on the inside back page.

Appendix

Corporal Works of Mercy

The Corporal Works of Mercy are these kind acts by which we help our neighbours with their material and physical needs.

- feed the hungry
- give drink to the thirsty
- clothe the naked
- shelter the homeless
- visit the sick
- visit the imprisoned
- bury the dead

Spiritual Works of Mercy

The Spiritual Works of Mercy are acts of compassion, as listed below, by which we help our neighbours with their emotional and spiritual needs.

- counsel the doubtful
- instruct the ignorant
- admonish sinners
- comfort the afflicted
- forgive offenses
- bear wrongs patiently
- pray for the living and the dead

Pope Francis on Works of Mercy

15. It is my burning desire 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. And let us 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.

Let us 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 causes them to fall into despair and which is often a source of loneliness; if we have helped to overcome the ignorance in which millions of people live, especially children deprived of the necessary means to free them from the bonds of poverty; 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; if we have had the kind of patience God shows, who is so patient with us; and if we have commended our brothers and sisters to the Lord in prayer. In each of these "little ones," Christ himself is present. His flesh becomes visible in the flesh of the tortured, the crushed, the scourged, the malnourished, and the exiled... to be acknowledged, touched, and cared for by us.

Let us not forget the words of Saint John of the Cross: "as we prepare to leave this life, we will be judged on the basis of love".

(Pope Francis, Papal Bull on Year of Mercy)

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The Name of God is Mercy, Pope Francis, Translated by Oonagh Stransky, © Bluebird, 2016

Misericordiae Vultus, Pope Francis, www.vatican.va

Pope Benedict. Message for Lent 2012 www.vatican.va

Pope Francis, General Audience & Announcement of Jubilee of Mercy, www.vatican.va

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Prayer to be Merciful to Others

*This prayer is from the diary of St Maria Faustina Kowalska.
It can be used as a morning offering or an evening examination of conscience.*

O Most Holy Trinity!

Help me, O Lord, that my eyes may be merciful,
so that I may never suspect or judge from appearances,
but look for what is beautiful in my neighbours' souls
and come to their rescue.

Help me, that my ears may be merciful,
so that I may give heed to my neighbours' needs
and not be indifferent to their pains and moanings.

Help me, O Lord, that my tongue may be merciful,
so that I should never speak negatively of my neighbour,
but have a word of comfort and forgiveness for all.

Help me, O Lord, that my hands may be merciful
and filled with good deeds,
so that I may do only good to my neighbours
and take upon myself the more difficult and toilsome tasks.

Help me, that my feet may be merciful,
so that I may hurry to assist my neighbour,
overcoming my own fatigue and weariness.
My true rest is in the service of my neighbour.

Help me, O Lord, that my heart may be merciful
so that I myself may feel all the sufferings of my neighbour.
I will refuse my heart to no one.
I will be sincere even with those who, I know, will abuse my kindness.

May Your mercy, O Lord, rest upon me.



AT TIMES WE ARE CALLED TO GAZE EVEN MORE ATTENTIVELY ON MERCY SO THAT WE MAY BECOME A MORE EFFECTIVE SIGN OF THE FATHER'S ACTION IN OUR LIVES. FOR THIS REASON I HAVE PROCLAIMED AN EXTRAORDINARY JUBILEE OF MERCY AS A SPECIAL TIME FOR THE CHURCH, A TIME WHEN THE WITNESS OF BELIEVERS MIGHT GROW STRONGER AND MORE EFFECTIVE.

POPE FRANCIS (MISERICORDIAE VULTUS)

Lent Group Discussion Material 2016

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