

Mercy Meditation – December, 2015

Our Holy Father, Pope Francis, has proclaimed for the Church and the world a “Jubilee of Mercy” running from December 8, 2015, to November 20, 2016. God willing, we will be offering one true “Mercy Story” for each of the next 11 months of the Jubilee.

But this month let us introduce this series by answering 2 essential questions : “What is Mercy?” and “How important is Mercy?”

Mercy is an act by which someone who is seriously offended forgives the offender rather than seeking revenge (Luke 23:34). It is also an act by which someone who is strong takes the risk of reaching out to help someone who is helpless even though he or she wouldn’t have to (Luke 10:33-35). In its purest form, Mercy is seen when someone who is weak and in great pain is moved, by the power of love alone, to help someone who is stronger and in less pain (Luke 23:27-31). Mercy always comes as a surprise. Its recipient has no right to expect it. Its giver has no duty to extend it.

Mercy, in all its expressions, is surprisingly the most prominent characteristic of Almighty God Himself (Exodus 34:6, Psalm 103:8). Jesus, true God and true man, is the proof of this, both in His teaching and in His life, death and resurrection.

How important is Mercy? Judging by Matthew 25:31ff., there’s a reason why God subjects us to a short life in a fallen world before giving us life in Heaven with Him forever: To develop in us an automatic Mercy Response to people in all kinds of needs whom He places in our path of life.

Now, Jesus knows that as self-absorbed sinners, we may need the “push” of fear to get us started on the path of Mercy. After that, the “pull” of love can take over. That’s why Jesus tells us we cannot expect to receive Mercy from God if we withhold it from others (Matthew 5:7, 18:33). But the goal is for us to show Mercy automatically, impelled by our gratitude to God for His Mercy towards us (Matthew 18:33) and by our sheer love for people in every imaginable situation of need (Matthew 25:37-40)!

This is clearly a tall order for people born in sin and living in a broken and often brutal world. But Jesus has overcome the world (John 16:33) and made us also “more than conquerors” through our Baptism into Him and His victory (Romans 8:37).

How important is it for us to become Merciful? At no point does Jesus ever imply that that we can get to Heaven without it. If we come to the end of this life before Mercy has become second nature to us, Purgatory will finish the process, painfully but effectively (Matthew 18:33-35, cf. 5:26). In our future Mercy Stories we will see how Jesus actually turns self-absorbed sinners into selfless saints. These true stories are a beacon of hope for people who think it can’t happen to them.