

Meditations on Mercy: February 2016

For each month of the Jubilee of Mercy, we offer reflections based on scripture passages that Pope Francis uses in his Bull *Misericordiae Vultus* (MV). By beginning with a scripture passage and a reference to paragraphs in *Misericordiae Vultus*, each reflection offers a way to more deeply embrace the call to embody mercy that is asked of every Christian. These reflections can be done on your own, with your family, or with small groups in your parish.

GATHERING

(10 minutes)

- Pray: Prayer of Pope Francis for the Jubilee of Mercy (www.iubilaeummisericordiae.va/content/gdm/en/giubileo/bolla.html)
- Discuss: Outside of our group activity, how did you see the mercy of God working in your life over the past few weeks?

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Mt 9:13; Ps 146:7-9; Ps 147:3, 6; MV, no. 6, 20

“Go and learn the meaning of the words, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ I did not come to call the righteous but sinners.” (Mt 9:13)

[It is the Lord who] “secures justice for the oppressed, / who gives bread to the hungry. / The Lord sets prisoners free; / the Lord gives sight to the blind. / The Lord raises up those who are bowed down; / the Lord loves the righteous. / The Lord protects the resident alien, / comes to the aid of the orphan and the widow, / but thwarts the way of the wicked.” (Ps 146:7-9)

[The Lord is] “healing the broken hearted, / and binding up their wounds. . . . The Lord gives aid to the poor, / but casts the wicked to the ground.” (Ps 147:3, 6)

During Lent, we work to renew our lives through prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. These disciplines help prepare us to celebrate the memorial of the life, Death, and Resurrection of Christ at Easter. Usually, we are encouraged to give something up or fast from something (for example, give up desserts) or make a certain sacrifice (for example, do service at a local shelter). While these practices strengthen our spiritual lives, it is important that we do them with the right intention. In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus tells the Pharisees that God desires mercy (Mt 9:13). This is in opposition to the practice of empty sacrifices in which a person is merely going through the motions. Those who make empty sacrifices are not making a real commitment to reestablishing their relationship with God by changing their lifestyle to reflect God’s love and mercy.

Our sacrifices must involve the proper attitude and action, because God’s mercy is not just an idea. It is “a concrete reality with which he reveals his love as that of a father or a mother, moved to the very depths out of love for their child” (MV, no. 6). The acts of kindness and compassion that we read about in Psalms 146 and 147 are actions that the Lord does. God inspires his people to care for the sick, the poor, the oppressed, the prisoner, and those who are suffering hardship. Because God first loves us and shows us his compassion, we, in turn, are able to show compassion to our brothers and sisters. These compassionate acts are especially seen in the corporal works of mercy (cf.

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Mt 25:31-46). The corporal works of mercy are “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” (MV, no. 15). During this Lenten season, let us strive to practice the corporal works of mercy with an attitude of mercy and compassion toward our neighbor so that others may experience the love of God through our actions.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What is one thing within each Lenten discipline of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving that you can do this Lent out of compassion? Are there activities you can do with friends, as a family, or with your parish?
2. Is there one particular corporal work of mercy that you already participate in or would like to become involved with during this Jubilee of Mercy? Why do you feel called to this particular act of mercy? Reflect on your life, and note any times that you have been on the receiving end of these mercies. Continue passing on God’s merciful love by checking with your local parish to see what sort of ministries are already offered that involve these corporal works of mercy, and become involved with them.

CLOSING PRAYER

(5 minutes)

- Assemble intentions and reflections from this week’s gathering.