



ARCHBISHOP'S PENTECOST LETTER TO YOUTH 2016
Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne

Be
merciful, as
your heavenly
Father is
merciful

Giving and receiving mercy

Pope Francis has declared an 'Extraordinary Year of Mercy' for the whole church. Yet mercy is a concept that is easily misunderstood. You can't learn it from a text book. Jesus told many parables to help us learn more about mercy - one such parable he told at a dinner party.

There was once a creditor who had two men in his debt; one owed him five hundred denarii, the other fifty. They were unable to pay, so he let them both off. (Luke 7:41-42)

Jesus asked the people: 'Which of them will love him more, the person who is forgiven a little or the person who is forgiven much?' For the people at the dinner party, the answer was obvious. His host spoke up and answered: 'The one who is forgiven much.'

If we have never *received* mercy, or if we think that we don't need mercy, then we won't know how to show mercy to others.

Knowing the mercy of Jesus

I have often experienced mercy in my life. As a child, I received mercy primarily from my parents and teachers. As I have grown older, I have also received mercy from my friends and colleagues.

Most importantly, I have known the mercy of Jesus. I have often had to admit that I am 'a sinner', and come to Jesus for forgiveness. Yes, even archbishops need to go to the Sacrament of Reconciliation! I go regularly, because I need God's mercy for the things I have done wrong. And, through the priest who hears my confession, God always forgives me! Never once have I left the confessional without knowing the deep mercy of Jesus Christ.

An interviewer once asked Pope Francis 'Who is Jorge Mario Bergoglio?' (that's the Pope's birth name). He answered:

I am a sinner. This is the most accurate definition.... I am a sinner whom the Lord has looked upon. (Antonio Spadaro SJ, America Magazine, September 30 2013)

Pope Francis is a man of great mercy. But this is because he himself has come to Jesus as a sinner, and Jesus has looked upon him with mercy.

Be merciful like your Heavenly Father

In the Old Testament God told the people of Israel at Mount Sinai: 'You shall be holy for I the Lord your God am holy' (Lev 19:2). In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus says: 'Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect' (Matt 5:48). Be like your heavenly Father. Be perfect. Be holy. How can we live up to these expectations? In Luke's Gospel, Jesus makes it much simpler. He says: 'Be merciful, as your heavenly Father is merciful' (Luke 6:36). Luke is telling us that the way to be perfect and holy is to *be merciful*.

Simple? Yes. Easy? No.

Mercy is 'the loving kindness and compassion shown to those who offend' (Glossary, Catechism of the Catholic Church). Therefore to *be* mercy, the feelings of love and compassion must overflow into *action*. In the Holy Year of Mercy, Pope Francis has especially asked us to pay attention to the 'works of mercy'. The Catechism teaches us that there are of two kinds of 'works of mercy': spiritual and bodily (or 'corporal').

*The works of mercy are charitable actions by which we come to the aid of our neighbour in his spiritual and bodily necessities. Instructing, advising, consoling, comforting are **spiritual works of mercy**, as are forgiving and bearing wrongs patiently.*

*The **corporal works of mercy** consist especially in feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned, and burying the dead. (Catechism of the Catholic Church §2447)*

Of course, we should not need a list of 'things to do' to be merciful. True children of the God show mercy to others because they are like their heavenly Father: *they are merciful*.

The Holy Spirit of mercy

To help us to be like him, God pours the special gift of the Holy Spirit into our hearts. This gives us the power to *be merciful*. I recently heard a young man describe mercy using an analogy. If we think of God's mercy like water, then there are two ways we can bring it to others.

The first is to try to be like a bucket to catch as much mercy from God as we can and then carry it to others. The only trouble is that we are all flawed and cracked and often the mercy runs out of us like water from a broken bucket before we get a chance to share it with others.

The other option is to be like a hose; to be connected directly to God, the source of mercy. As a hose is connected to a tap, allowing water to flow through it, so when the Holy Spirit connects us to God, his mercy flows through us, and we become merciful to others.

So how does the Holy Spirit connect us to God? Through the Sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation, Reconciliation and the Eucharist. We also connect to God through hearing and meditating on his Word in the scriptures. Simply put – by spending time with him. By getting to know God better we are able to reflect his mercy in the world.

Pope Francis reflects this Spirit-filled mercy in his prayer for the Year of Mercy:

...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...

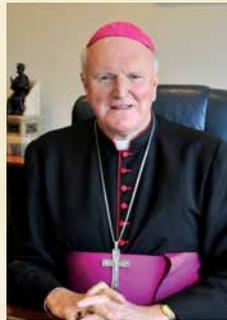
If we have never received *mercy*,
or if we think we don't need
mercy, then we won't know
how to show
mercy, to others

The mercy of our Mother Mary

Pope Francis concludes his prayer for the Year of Mercy 'through the intercession of Mary, Mother of Mercy'. Mothers are remarkable models of mercy: they give life and they nurture life.

Mary, the Mother of Jesus, shares deeply in the mercy of her Son Jesus. We can always rely on her to help us with her prayers and her love. She too can be a great model for us, because as the Mother of Jesus, she received the great mercy of God our Father and reflected it into the darkness of our world like the moon reflects the light of the Sun.

So let us follow Pope Francis' example and pray that Mary, Mother of Mercy, will support us and stand with us as we seek to be 'merciful like the Father'.



+ Denis J. Hart

† Denis J Hart
ARCHBISHOP OF MELBOURNE

Watch the video and access resources at: www.cam.org.au/YouthLetter