

***Franciscan University Presents***  
***“Mercy in Action”***  
***Father Michael Gaitley, MIC***

***Free handout: Excerpts from Misericordiae Vultus***  
**BULL OF INDICATION OF THE EXTRAORDINARY JUBILEE OF MERCY**

**FRANCIS**  
**BISHOP OF ROME**  
**SERVANT OF THE SERVANTS OF GOD**  
**TO ALL WHO READ THIS LETTER**  
**GRACE, MERCY, AND PEACE**

1. Jesus Christ is the face of the Father’s mercy. These words might well sum up the mystery of the Christian faith. Mercy has become living and visible in Jesus of Nazareth, reaching its culmination in him. The Father, “rich in mercy” (*Eph 2:4*), after having revealed his name to Moses as “a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness” (*Ex34:6*), has never ceased to show, in various ways throughout history, his divine nature. In the “fullness of time” (*Gal 4:4*), when everything had been arranged according to his plan of salvation, he sent his only Son into the world, born of the Virgin Mary, to reveal his love for us in a definitive way. Whoever sees Jesus sees the Father (cf. *Jn 14:9*). Jesus of Nazareth, by his words, his actions, and his entire person[1] reveals the mercy of God.

2. We need constantly to contemplate the mystery of mercy. It is a wellspring of joy, serenity, and peace. Our salvation depends on it. Mercy: the word reveals the very mystery of the Most Holy Trinity. Mercy: the ultimate and supreme act by which God comes to meet us. Mercy: the fundamental law that dwells in the heart of every person who looks sincerely into the eyes of his brothers and sisters on the path of life. Mercy: the bridge that connects God and man, opening our hearts to the hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness.

6. “It is proper to God to exercise mercy, and he manifests his omnipotence particularly in this way”. [5] Saint Thomas Aquinas’ words show that God’s mercy, rather than a sign of weakness, is the mark of his omnipotence. For this reason the liturgy, in one of its most ancient collects, has us pray: “O God, who reveal your power above all in your mercy and forgiveness ...” [6] Throughout the history of humanity, God will always be the One who is present, close, provident, holy, and merciful.

“Patient and merciful.” These words often go together in the Old Testament to describe God’s nature. His being merciful is concretely demonstrated in his many actions throughout the history of salvation where his goodness prevails over punishment and destruction. In a special way the Psalms bring to the fore the grandeur of his merciful action: “He forgives all your iniquity, he heals all your diseases, he redeems your life from the pit, he crowns you with steadfast love and mercy” (*Ps 103:3-4*). Another psalm, in an even more explicit way, attests to the concrete signs of

his mercy: "He executes justice for the oppressed; he gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets the prisoners free; the Lord opens the eyes of the blind. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous. The Lord watches over the sojourners, he upholds the widow and the fatherless; but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin" (*Ps* 146:7-9). Here are some other expressions of the Psalmist: "He heals the brokenhearted, and binds up their wounds... The Lord lifts up the downtrodden, he casts the wicked to the ground" (*Ps* 147:3, 6). In short, the mercy of God is not an abstract idea, but a concrete reality with which he reveals his love as of that of a father or a mother, moved to the very depths out of love for their child. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that this is a "visceral" love. It gushes forth from the depths naturally, full of tenderness and compassion, indulgence and mercy.

8. With our eyes fixed on Jesus and his merciful gaze, we experience the love of the Most Holy Trinity. The mission Jesus received from the Father was that of revealing the mystery of divine love in its fullness. "God is love" (*1 Jn* 4:8,16), John affirms for the first and only time in all of Holy Scripture. This love has now been made visible and tangible in Jesus' entire life. His person is nothing but love, a love given gratuitously. The relationships he forms with the people who approach him manifest something entirely unique and unrepeatable. The signs he works, especially in favour of sinners, the poor, the marginalized, the sick, and the suffering, are all meant to teach mercy. Everything in him speaks of mercy. Nothing in him is devoid of compassion.

Jesus, seeing the crowds of people who followed him, realized that they were tired and exhausted, lost and without a guide, and he felt deep compassion for them (cf. *Mt* 9:36). On the basis of this compassionate love he healed the sick who were presented to him (cf. *Mt* 14:14), and with just a few loaves of bread and fish he satisfied the enormous crowd (cf. *Mt* 15:37). What moved Jesus in all of these situations was nothing other than mercy, with which he read the hearts of those he encountered and responded to their deepest need. When he came upon the widow of Nain taking her son out for burial, he felt great compassion for the immense suffering of this grieving mother, and he gave back her son by raising him from the dead (cf. *Lk* 7:15). After freeing the demoniac in the country of the Gerasenes, Jesus entrusted him with this mission: "Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you" (*Mk* 5:19). 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*. [7] This expression impressed me so much that I chose it for my episcopal motto.

9. 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.

As we can see in Sacred Scripture, mercy is a key word that indicates God's action towards us. He does not limit himself merely to affirming his love, but makes it visible and tangible. Love, after all, can never be just an abstraction. By its very nature, it indicates something concrete: intentions, attitudes, and behaviours that are shown in daily living. The mercy of God is his loving concern for each one of us. He feels responsible; that is, he desires our wellbeing and he wants to see us happy, full of joy, and peaceful. This is the path which the merciful love of Christians must also travel. As the Father loves, so do his children. Just as he is merciful, so we are called to be merciful to each other.

15. In this Holy Year, we look forward to the experience of opening our hearts to those living on the outermost fringes of society: fringes which modern society itself creates. How many uncertain and painful situations there are in the world today! How many are the wounds borne by the flesh of those who have no voice because their cry is muffled and drowned out by the indifference of the rich! During this Jubilee, the Church will be called even more to heal these wounds, to assuage them with the oil of consolation, to bind them with mercy and cure them with solidarity and vigilant care. Let us not fall into humiliating indifference or a monotonous routine that prevents us from discovering what is new! Let us ward off destructive cynicism! Let us open our eyes and see the misery of the world, the wounds of our brothers and sisters who are denied their dignity, and let us recognize that we are compelled to heed their cry for help! May we reach out to them and support them so they can feel the warmth of our presence, our friendship, and our fraternity! May their cry become our own, and together may we break down the barriers of indifference that too often reign supreme and mask our hypocrisy and egoism!

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".[12]

*Given in Rome, at Saint Peter's, on 11 April, the Vigil of the Second Sunday of Easter, or the Sunday of Divine Mercy, in the year of our Lord 2015, the third of my Pontificate. Nos. 1-15 listed.*

[1] Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, 4.

[2] Opening Address of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia*, 11 October 1962, 2-3.

[3] Speech at the Final Public Session of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, 7 December 1965.

[4] Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 16: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 15.

[5] Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 30. a. 4.

[6] XXVI Sunday in Ordinary Time. This Collect already appears in the eighth century among the eucharistical texts of the Gelasian Sacramentary (1198).

[7] Cf. Homily 22: CCL, 122, 149-151.

[8] Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 24.

[9] No. 2.

[10] Saint John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Dives in Misericordia*, 15.

[11] *Ibid.*, 13.

[12] *Words of Light and Love*, 57.

[13] *Homilies on the Psalms*, 76, 11.

**Titles Mentioned on *Franciscan University Presents***

**“Mercy in Action”**

**with guest, Father Michael Gaitley, MIC**

**\* *You Did It to Me: A Practical Guide to Mercy in Action* by Father Michael Gaitley, MIC. Marian Press.**

**\* *Evangelii Gaudium, “The Joy of the Gospel”* by Pope Francis. U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops**

**\* *Misericordiae Vultus, “Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy”* by Pope Francis.**

**\* *Consoling the Heart of Jesus* by Father Michael Gaitley, MIC. Marian Press.**

**\* *Dives in Misericordia, “Rich in Mercy”* by Pope John Paul II. Catholic Truth Society.**

***Paul and the Gift* by John M. G. Barclay. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.**

**\* *33 Days to Morning Glory* by Father Michael Gaitley, MIC. Marian Press.**

***The Merchant of Venice* by William Shakespeare.**

**\* *Still Point: Loss, Longing, and Our Search for God* by Dr. Regis Martin. Ave Maria Press.**

**\* *Angels and Saints: A Biblical Guide to Friendship With God’s Holy Ones* by Dr. Scott Hahn. Image Publishing.**

**\* *Evangelizing Catholics: A Mission Manual for the New Evangelization* by Dr. Scott Hahn. Our Sunday Visitor.**

**\* *The Beggar’s Banquet: A Personal Retreat on Christ, His Mother, the Spiritual Life, and the Saints* by Dr. Regis Martin. Emmaus Road Publishing.**

**\*Available through the Franciscan University Bookstore, 1235 University Blvd., Steubenville, OH 43952.**

**1-888-333-0381, [www.franciscan.edu/bookstore](http://www.franciscan.edu/bookstore).**

**For the free handout mentioned during the show, visit [FaithandReason.com](http://FaithandReason.com) or contact us at [presents@franciscan.edu](mailto:presents@franciscan.edu) or 1-888-333-0381.**

**View previously aired episodes of *Franciscan University Presents* at [FaithandReason.com](http://FaithandReason.com).**



*Academically Excellent, Passionately Catholic*  
Steubenville, Ohio, USA  
1-800-783-6220, [Franciscan.edu](http://Franciscan.edu)