

Living the Spirit Mercy Part 3

In previous writings I have tried to summarize some of the meanings of mercy in the Old Testament. I used as my source a text called the *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*. This text, probably no longer in print, has its origin from French theological experts in Scripture studies. I say this because I am not myself such an expert, and I want you to know that I am relying on good and orthodox writers of an approved source.

That having been said, I want to speak to the meaning of “mercy” as found in the New Testament. Before doing so, let me repeat what I wrote about the word “mercy” as it has been translated. For Israel mercy meant two streams of thought, compassion and fidelity. Compassion is seen as found in the maternal bosom, or the heart of the father. Mercy is an instinctive goodness, conscious and freely willed. So translations may mean mercy but be better understood as piety, tenderness, compassion, clemency, grace. And one cannot discount how mercy often means love and forgiveness.

When we study the New Testament we find in the Gospels a teaching of Christ which certainly centers on the love of the Father for his created beings. In Luke Jesus bears witness to mercy in a general way with a personal aspect. Jesus is concerned about the widow’s only son, the bereaved father, the woman taken in adultery, the strangers, the sinners, and the poor.

One has only to reflect on the parable of the Prodigal Son to learn how Jesus teaches us the love and mercy and forgiveness of the Father. From it we learn how we have received mercy. And yet there is more to learn. It is that we must be merciful as the Father is merciful. Indeed Paul calls God the “Father of mercies.” Luke tells us to be merciful “as your Father is merciful.”

In this Year of Mercy what does this mean for us? Let me tell you what I think it means for me. First of all, it means to be merciful to myself. That means to have a realistic understanding of God’s goodness to me. This will lead me to be more thankful for His wonderful gifts. It means also to be forgiving. Now I have to think hard about whom I may have to forgive. I really have not lived seeing others as enemies. Yet, if there should be such, I just must be forgiving.

As to my own need of forgiveness, well, as a Catholic I know that I am a sinner in need of God’s mercy. That is why I am so grateful that Jesus gave us the Sacrament of Reconciliation. In that sacrament I make clear that I want all my sins forgiven. I do so by not limiting myself to sorrow for sins I clearly remember. Nor do I place any limits to the love of God that I know I should have. My act of contrition says it all. I write this asserting my own firm belief, my faith, which is itself a merciful gift of God.

Then in this Year I must also ask myself if I am merciful to others. That mercy can mean being good to the poor. It means not judging others as sinners. It means something of all those words written above. I must allow myself to be compassionate, to feel a relationship with others that is filled with goodness, compassion, love and tenderness. I remind you how Pope Francis has called for a “revolution of tenderness” for our world today.

Here let me here write about the one parable that speaks volumes to me about the mercy of God. It is a marvelous story of a younger son who has everything at home with his father and family. Yet he is not happy and satisfied. He yearns for his inheritance – which speaks to his failure to truly love his father as he should. What son wants the inheritance when we all know what that means? The father decides to give the son just what he asks for. The son happily takes it and goes his own way. He spends it recklessly and sinfully, finding himself destitute, without the very necessities of a normal life. Then as the story goes, he comes to his senses. He recalls what he had before at home. He thinks of how he might regain that state of life he so foolishly lost. He tells himself, “I will ask my father to let me a servant in the household, for surely he would not let me his son.” But the story ends with his determination to go to the father and confesses his sins. The father sees him from far off and he welcomes him. He is restored to his former status as a son and heir. Then the father assures his older son that he is not less loved or less a son because of his goodness to his brother.

Now my writing this does not have the beauty of the original. But I meditate on it and find that I, like you, have too often been like the younger son. I must say outright I really have not been tempted much to be like the older son. I want all to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth and receive God’s loving mercy. Yet, I know I may need to be still more ready to confess my sins, to accept the Father’s mercy. To realize how much my inheritance is – no less than eternal life.

What will be your reflection on all this? Let it be the active living of the Spirit of mercy. Do not let this Year go by without be merciful and receiving mercy. Make sure you work to receive the Indulgence of the Holy Year. Be merciful to the departed and receive it again for one or more of them. I know this sounds like old fashioned piety to some. But that is the only advice I can give. I do so with an affection for all of my readers as fellow travelers on the journey – from God to God. Let never stop calling to our God: *“Kyrie eleison”-“Lord, have mercy.”*

The Holy Doors

The Holy Years have always been a time of pilgrimages, actual or spiritual. One cannot travel without passing through many doors, gates, or borders. Pope Francis in his announcement of the Jubilee has written: “To experience and obtain the Indulgence, the faithful are called to make a brief pilgrimage to the Holy Door, open in every Cathedral.... It is important that the moment [of passing through the Holy Door] be linked to the Sacrament of Reconciliation and to the celebration of the Eucharist with a reflection on mercy. It will be necessary to accompany these celebrations with the profession of faith and with prayer for me and my intentions that I bear in my heart for the good of the Church and the entire world.”

The Holy Father tells those unable to go through the Holy Door – the sick, elderly and alone – “to live their sickness and suffering with an experience of closeness to the Lord, who in the mystery of His passion... indicates the royal road which gives meaning to pain and loneliness.”

God love and bless you and be merciful to you!
Monsignor Morrison