

## Misericordiae Vultus (Pope Francis, 11.04.15)

‘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” (Ephesians 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” (Exodus 34:6), has never ceased to show, in various ways throughout history, his divine nature. In the “fullness of time” (Galatians 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. John 14:9). Jesus of Nazareth, by his words, his actions, and his entire person[1] reveals the mercy of God’ (n.1).

*Old Age – journey into simplicity:* Helen M. Luke

The American Heritage Dictionary tells us that the oldest known root of the word “mercy” is probably the Etruscan *merc*, from which such words as commerce and merchant are derived. It is therefore connected with basic images of exchange – value given and received between people. Like so many other meanings hidden in our language, the word commerce, debased to commercialism, has lost much of its dignity, since it often signifies greed for money through dishonest efforts to destroy competitors. But the root meaning of exchange persisted and developed in another context, its meaning deepening through the French *merci* to grateful response and kindness of heart, and finally to the compassion and forgiveness, including all our share of darkness, whereby we are able to open ourselves to the Mercy. This is the ultimate “exchange” that, when we come to a final letting go, may reveal to us the whole.

It is a lovely thing to connect the constantly used *merci*, meaning thank you in France, with the Mercy that frees all faults. It has become (like our own “good-bye” for instance: “God be with you”), a polite formula used without feeling or thought – but even when unconsciously spoken, words have power – and often it carries between people the courtesy that is a mark of the presence of love.  
(pages 84-85)

‘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 a hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness’(n.2).

‘Mercy will always be greater than any sin, and no one can place limits on the love of God who is ever ready to forgive. The Holy Year will open on 8 December 2015, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception’(n.3).

‘I have chosen the date of 8 December because of its rich meaning in the recent history of the Church. In fact, I will open the Holy Door on the fiftieth anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council. The Church feels a great need to keep this event alive. With the Council, the Church entered a new phase of her history. The Council Fathers strongly perceived, as a true breath of the Holy Spirit, a need to talk about God to men and women of their time in a more accessible way. The walls which too long had made the Church a kind of fortress were torn down and the time had come to proclaim the Gospel in a new way. It was a new phase of the same evangelization that had existed from the beginning. It was a fresh undertaking for all Christians to bear witness to their faith with greater enthusiasm and conviction. The Church sensed a responsibility to be a living sign of the Father’s love in the world’(n.4).

4 (continued).

‘We recall the poignant words of Saint John XXIII when, opening the Council, he indicated the path to follow: “Now the Bride of Christ wishes to use the medicine of mercy rather than taking up arms of severity ... The Catholic Church, as she holds high the torch of Catholic truth at this Ecumenical Council, wants to show herself a loving mother to all; patient, kind, moved by compassion and goodness toward her separated children.” Blessed Paul VI spoke in a similar vein at the closing of the Council: “We prefer to point out how charity has been the principal religious feature of this Council ... the old story of the Good Samaritan has been the model of the spirituality of the Council ... a wave of affection and admiration flowed from the Council over the modern world of humanity.’

#### n.4 continued

‘Errors were condemned, indeed, because charity demanded this no less than did truth, but for individuals themselves there was only admonition, respect and love. Instead of depressing diagnoses, encouraging remedies; instead of direful predictions, messages of trust issued from the Council to the present-day world. The modern world’s values were not only respected but honoured, its efforts approved, its aspirations purified and blessed ... Another point we must stress is this: all this rich teaching is channeled in one direction, the service of mankind, of every condition, in every weakness and need.’”

‘The Lord Jesus shows us the steps of the pilgrimage to attain our goal: “Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For the measure you give will be the measure you get back” (Luke 6:37-38). The Lord asks us above all not to judge and not to condemn. If anyone wishes to avoid God’s judgement, he should not make himself the judge of his brother or sister. Human beings, whenever they judge, look no farther than the surface, whereas the Father looks into the very depths of the soul. be instruments of mercy because it was we who first received mercy from God. To be generous with others, knowing that God showers his goodness upon us with immense generosity’(n.14).

## n.14 continued

‘How much harm words do when they are motivated by feelings of jealousy and envy! To speak ill of others puts them in a bad light, undermines their reputation and leaves them prey to the whims of gossip. To refrain from judgement and condemnation means, in a positive sense, to know how to accept the good in every person and to spare him any suffering that might be caused by our partial judgment and our presumption to know everything about him. But this is still not sufficient to express mercy. Jesus asks us also to forgive and to give. To be instruments of mercy because it was we who first received mercy from God. To be generous with others, knowing that God showers his goodness upon us with immense generosity.’

The Wisdom Jesus: Transforming Heart and Mind – a New Perspective on Christ and His Message, Cynthia Bourgeault, page 45.

“Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.”

In this beatitude Jesus again returns to the idea of flow. Notice that there’s an exchange going on here: we give mercy and we receive mercy. And this is not coincidental, for the root of the word “mercy” comes from the old Etruscan merc, which also gives us “commerce” and “merchant”. It’s all about exchange.

Usually we think of the mercy of God as a kind of divine clemency, and we pray, “Lord have mercy upon us” as a confession of our weakness and dependency. Because these qualities are distasteful to a lot of modern people, the “Lord have mercy” prayer has currently gone a bit out of style. But in this other understanding, mercy is not something God has; it’s something that God *is*. Exchange is the very nature of divine life – of consciousness itself, according to modern neurological science – and all things share in the divine life through participation in this dance of giving and receiving. The brilliant young South African teacher Michael Brown writes in his 2005 book *The Presence Process*: “Giving is receiving is the energetic frequency upon which our universe is aligned. All other approaches to energy exchange immediately cause dissonance and disharmony in our life experience.” Surely Jesus knew this as well, and his teaching in this beatitude invites us into a deeper trust of that flow. Exchange is at the very heart of his understanding of “no separation”.