



“Instruments of Divine Mercy.”

BIBLICAL REFLECTION

Is. 55:9-10. “My thoughts are not your thoughts nor my ways your ways,” declares the Lord. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain and snow come down from heaven and do not return without watering the earth and making it bear and sprout and furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so will my word which issues from my mouth. It will not return to me empty.”

2. In this *Year of Mercy*, we’re called to be “Instruments of Divine Mercy.” This presents two obvious challenges:-

- a) “Instrument” suggests being controlled & most of us would much rather be IN control,
- b) By its very name, “Divine Mercy” indicates something beyond human comprehension, so how do we recognise and acquire it?

3. We’re taught that we can’t APPLY mercy until we’ve learned to RECEIVE it from God, which begs the question: WHERE IS GOD’S MERCY?

4. The Old Testament (Exodus Chapter 21:24) tells us to demand “an eye for an eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand and foot for foot.” Not much mercy there! And although other passages proclaim God’s mercy, it’s somehow hard to reconcile it with the overwhelming image projected of an awesome, omnipotent, almost frightening being.

5. In the New Testament, Jesus, as well as demonstrating compassion at every turn, chose the following parable (Matt.18:23-35) to illustrate how humanity falls short of Divine Mercy:-

R: The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who decided to settle his accounts with his servants. When the reckoning began, they brought him a man who owed ten thousand talents, but he had no means of paying, so his master gave orders that he should be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, to meet the debt. / At this, the servant threw himself down at his master’s feet. “Give me time,” he said, “and I will pay the whole sum.” And the servant’s master felt so sorry for him that he let him go and cancelled the debt. / Now, as this servant went out, he happened to meet a fellow servant who owed him a hundred denarii - and he seized him by the throat and began to throttle him. “Pay what you owe me,” he said. His fellow servant fell at his feet and implored him, saying, “Give me time and I will pay you.” But the other would not agree. On the contrary, he had him thrown into prison till he should pay the debt. / His fellow servants were deeply distressed when they saw what had happened, and they went to their master and reported the whole affair to him. Then the master sent for him. “You wicked servant,” he said, “I cancelled all that debt of yours when you appealed to me. Were you not bound, then, to have pity on your fellow servant, just

as I had pity on you?” / And, in his anger, the master handed him over to the torturers till he should pay all his debt. And that is how your heavenly Father will deal with you unless you forgive each other from the heart.

6. Likewise, Paul, in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3, emphasises the all-importance of love:-

R: If I have all the eloquence of men or of angels, but speak without love, I am simply a gong booming or a cymbal clashing. If I have the gift of prophecy, understanding all the mysteries there are, and knowing everything, and if I have faith in all its fullness, to move mountains, but without love, then I am nothing at all. If I give away all that I possess, piece by piece, and if I even let them take my body to burn it, but am without love, it will do me no good whatever.

7. Hopefully, we would all concur with the sentiments of this famous passage. Yet it can still leave us COLD, for, as we soon discover, it's one thing KNOWING the importance of love and mercy, quite another FEELING and IMPARTING the same. So, again, we're left with the burning question: WHERE IS LOVE?

8. Perhaps we find a clue in observing how God operates through human channels. The kindest, most merciful person I ever knew was a man who had a severe drink problem. He wasn't particularly devout or religious, but grappling with his own demons made him more understanding and merciful towards others. In recognising his own inadequacy, he became more compassionate towards his fellow human beings.

9. So, must we SUFFER in order to be MERCIFUL? It's not an attractive proposition, particularly in light of the giant strides made down the years to ease human hardship: improvements in science, technology, medicine, social welfare, etc. have all made our lives more comfortable. Are we to reverse the trend? Obviously not, but pondering Jesus' suffering on our behalf makes sense of our own suffering, as well as providing some sort of purpose.

10. Will this make us more MERCIFUL? And are we, as a Society, more or less MERCIFUL today? Judging by court sentencing, an eye for an eye is no longer demanded. However, human MERCY too often involves either undue LENIENCY, or, at the other extreme, unnecessary HARSHNESS, proving that, without God, we lose perspective.

11. PRAYER – communication with our Maker – helps us discover, or re-discover, Divine Justice by transcending human perception and imbalanced judgment, enabling us to accept His wisdom, grace and guidance in all things. And so we pray:-

R: Heavenly Father, open our hearts to recognise our faults, weaknesses, sins and inadequacies, that we might better understand and accept our failings and those of others and so come to a greater understanding of our place within Your Divine Realm. May we learn to impart Your true mercy to others as You impart it daily to us.

When we're prompted to judge harshly, **R: Temper our thoughts.**

When we seek retribution, **R: Soften our hearts.**

When we feel driven to extreme reactions, **R: Calm our spirit.**

We ask all these things through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

SPIRITUAL REFLECTION

As God is 'invisible' to the majority of humankind, we need to apply mercy on His behalf. Would non-believers recognise His Merciful Nature from observing us? (Tom Baker, Sidcup, Marist Way)