

Encouragement Encouragement

December 2015 – Issue 53

ADVENT of MERCY

We all look forward to Christmas – a time of joy. We prepare all our gifts and do the shopping in preparation for a time of gathering and meeting of family and friends. For some it is still a time of sorrow, of partings, loss, anguish, war, poverty and isolation. For some perhaps a time of regrets. Is it any wonder then, that we are asked to prepare well for this great feast of the coming of Our Redeemer – God from God, Light from Light, God among us made man, so He would be visible to us, and yes, as a tiny vulnerable baby. It was no mistake that this is so. It was not just for the ‘oohs and ahhs’ that often greet a new birth, a beautiful moment in any family’s life or for purely sentimental reasons of ‘glitter filled’ days, but because in that vulnerability and smallness He was heralding a new era of ‘man’s’ relationship with ‘man’.

In that ‘cradle’ lay the broken, the weak, the small, the marginalised, the fearful, the ill and the rejected. In that little cave or stable was the hope for mankind that, out of this morass of inequality and injustice, of suffering and inexplicable events there would be a hope of a better way of living, and a promise of better things to come. How great is that promise and how fulfilled, that in spite of all the ills of this world there is a hope for a better future in this world but also importantly for all eternity.

How merciful thus is the Redeemer, Saviour that allows us a reality of good defeating evil, and joy replacing sadness. Is it any wonder then that in these times the message is one of Mercy and Forgiveness.

On the Feast of the Immaculate Conception (December 8th) we start the ‘Year of Mercy’. Pope Francis has this to say: *“In this Jubilee Year may the Church echo the word of God that resounds strong and clear as a message and sign of pardon, strength, and love. May she never tire of extending mercy and be ever patient in offering compassion and comfort. May the Church become the voice of every man, woman (and child) and repeat confidently without end ‘Be Mindful of your Mercy, O Lord and your steadfast love, for they have been from old’.* (11th April 2015, Feast of Divine Mercy, Rome Ppl. Bull)

In the revelation to St. Faustyna Kowalska Jesus proclaimed that the greatest attribute of God is His

Mercy- (1905-1938). This revelation however was to reinforce what we see in the Old and New Testament so clearly manifest. We have often concentrated on the Old Testament as an indicator of God’s Anger, and Justice, not in the true sense of that word even, but in the rather vengeful and retributive sense. But the Old Testament is full of references to God’s Mercy- no more clearly is this true than in the Psalms, too many to quote – but for example ‘Have mercy on me oh God in your kindness,’ or Psalm 126 - ‘For His mercy endures forever’. If this is true of the Old Testament then how utterly convincing of its essence are the Gospels. The word mercy tumbles out in every page as an essential and integral element of our lives as Christian People, His Holy People.

No better place can this be seen than in the Beatitudes; ‘Blessed are the Merciful for they shall receive Mercy’ – surely central to our lives. Then again, in the Acts of the Apostles and Letters of St. Paul, say for example in Romans 12:8 ‘May the word of the Apostle accompany us- he who does acts of mercy let him do them with cheerfulness’ or the beautiful phrase ‘God of compassion and love, rich in mercy, abounding in love’, (Eph.2:4).

The crux of the true believer, his or her mission is to exemplify the Mercy of God to all people.

All that is essential to goodness lies in the little word with huge implications- *Mercy*.

It is interesting that in French it is used as a word of ‘Thanks’ and ‘Pardon’ or ‘excuse me’ – indeed if one mishears something one can say ‘Merci’ to get the speaker to repeat. Maybe we should adopt this way of thinking about mercy. As people who have received **SO** much we should see Mercy as a thankful gift back to Jesus for His kindness to us. Mercy to others then becomes a thanksgiving prayer. If mercy is not central to all our dealings with each other then all our thoughts, however lofty are merely expressions of our intellect, our minds and not rooted in the grounds of selfless lives of love and forgiveness. The second meaning of ‘excuse me’ is of course another way of living

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The quality of mercy is not strained, It drops as the gentle rain from heaven Upon the place beneath.

It is twice blest: It blesses him that gives and him that takes. *Shakespeare*

mercy. We ask in the Our Father (Jesus' own prayer) to be forgiven as we forgive- we will receive mercy in the same way. If we forgive and are merciful we will be forgiven.

All, yes all, the Saints and Holy people have had Mercy as the centre of their mission in acts of Charity and Love. St. Faustyna own words, similar to those of great St. Teresa of Avila are as follows 'Jesus, My Master, grant that my eyes be always Merciful, my hands Merciful, my lips Merciful and my heart be full of Mercy. Transform me into Mercy.' What a beautiful way of praying that we become like Jesus Himself.



Back to Advent and a preparation for the Great Feast. We are always needing to be ready for His coming to us in the Eucharist, in Prayer, in Our Meetings, in our Feasts and at the end of time! What better way to prepare for this Christmas than by becoming more merciful and forgiving? We could use the Psalms, or Gospel readings to reflect on the many miracles of forgiveness and mercy. We could avail ourselves of the Sacrament of Mercy, Reconciliation and Forgiveness.

We could also learn about the works of Mercy, both the Physical/Corporal works and the Spiritual works of Mercy. If you are not familiar with these, learn what they are. (Readily available in the series of CTS pamphlets, on the internet, or in the Catechism). Maybe you could have a series of reflections in your parish or a group discussion and ask how we can live these out today... They are after all, practical guides to merciful living.

If we cannot be merciful we have no love in our hearts. When the word 'love' is so debased and often with reference to personal intimate sexual relationships, mercy still resounds as a beacon of hope for mankind.

Saint John Paul II's papacy highlighted in his Encyclical 'Dives in Misericordia' in 1980 the importance of mercy.

"The Church lives an authentic life when she professes and proclaims Mercy- the most stupendous attribute of the Creator and of the Redeemer and when she brings people close to the source of the Saviour's Mercy of which she is trustee and dispenser."

In the coming Jubilee year the Feast of Divine Mercy will be celebrated in a special way.

Halina Holman

Prayer Intentions

Universal: Experiencing God's Mercy:

That all may experience the Mercy of God who never tires of forgiving.

Evangelisation: Families:

That families, especially those who suffer, may find in the birth of Jesus a sign of certain hope.

'Send your Spirit and consecrate every one of us with this anointing so that the Jubilee Year of Mercy may be a year of Grace from the Lord and your Church renewed with enthusiasm may bring 'Good News' to the poor, proclaim liberty to captives and the oppressed and restore sight to the blind.'

Pope Francis, Rome 2015

Christmas Blessings and Greetings



Wishing you much Joy and Happiness this Christmas and thanking you for your support, work and donations

enabling us to continue our work. We receive many letters of thanks from those you help overseas in many lands. We would also like to thank the tireless number of people who help to promote and distribute 'Encouragement'. We are also grateful for the many prayers which we need.

Feasts in December

3rd St. Francis Xavier, 7th St. Ambrose

8th **Immaculate Conception of Our Lady**

12th Our Lady of Guadalupe,

14th St. John of the Cross, 23rd St. John of Kanty,

26th St. Stephen, 27th Holy Family

28th Holy Innocents, 29th St. Thomas á Becket

Advent Sundays 6th, 13th, 20th

Christmas Day 25th – Nativity of Our Lord

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