

PRAYER FOCUS FOR MONTH OF SEPTEMBER

The Year of Mercy: Be a Church for the Poor

REFLECTION ONE



From his early reign as pope, Francis is frequently calling on us **to be a Church for the poor**. He talks about it again when he speaks about the heart of God holding a special place for people who are poor, in his apostolic exhortation *The Joy of the Gospel*. Francis sets the example himself by seeking out the poor wherever he goes, and he frequently does what he can to alleviate their suffering. As Christians we all know the story well of Jesus' life on earth, but Francis puts it even more plainly.

He begins the story of a poor young woman, who had been asked by an angel to be the mother of God. Jesus could not have had a poorer beginning. When it became time for Mary and Joseph to go to Jerusalem as was the custom, to present the baby to the temple, the only accommodation they could find was a stable at Bethlehem, because there was no room for them in the inn. Neither could they afford the offering of a lamb – but just two turtle doves.

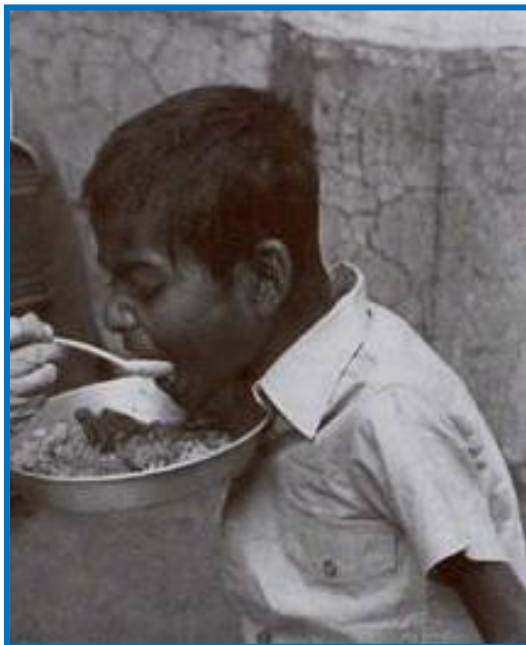
Growing up, Jesus undertook manual labour to put food on the table. When he first started speaking in public, his first words echoed those of the prophet Isaiah: he said he had good news for people who were poor, knowing he was one of them (Luke 4:15).

In the year of mercy, this is why Pope Francis has proclaimed that:

we need to bring our hearts closer to those who are poor in spirit and circumstance.

He takes the core of the Gospel of Jesus and doesn't just ask but encourages the Church to:

'draw near to new forms of poverty and vulnerability', particularly with 'the homeless, refugees, indigenous peoples, the elderly who are increasingly isolated and abandoned' and 'women who endure situations of exclusion, mistreatment and violence'.



The pope is calling for

a Church that is poor and standing with the poor.

Mary who had said 'yes' to the angel also sang a song about God putting the powerful and wealthy in their place, and about good things coming to those who are poor. When this occurs it can bring those who are powerful to humility – to their humanity – and closer to God. This is difficult and we often miss the mark, but we can always rely on the mercy of God who never tires of forgiving us. This is the Mercy of God and the Joy of the Gospel for all, rich and poor alike.¹

I invite you to reflect on the above, and how you connect with the poor, remembering that there are many ways to do this in bigger ways as well as small ways – and these can present themselves to us on a daily basis. Remember also that there is always prayer, which itself is a powerful action.

We also remember to pray for those who lost their lives recently in France & Turkey – also for refugee people that have fled their homes; we pray that people generally, may be more merciful in their attitude towards those seeking safe shelter. Also we remember our own detention centres where so much violence is occurring.

***Mary, woman of listening, open our ears;
grant us to know how to listen to the word of your Son Jesus
among the thousands of words of this world;
grant that we may listen to the reality in which we live,
to every person we encounter, especially those who are poor, in need, in hardship.
(Pope Francis, 31 May 2013)***

REFLECTION TWO



Just as God is with us as in our suffering and is continually turning his face towards us - a face of forgiveness, compassion and kindness – so we too, are called on to develop a heart of Mercy that is always concerned for the other, and the misery he might be undergoing. It is not a ‘one-off’ exercise - there is no limit to it.

Just as we hold the agony of ourselves or others in our hearts, so the heart of Mercy holds the agony of the whole world. We hold that agony in the same way as Mary, the Mother of Jesus, held the dead, lifeless body of Jesus taken down from the Cross. We see that dead, abandoned body of Jesus in the world’s agony now. We see the crucified One in those whom the world has abandoned, in our own hearts that are broken, as well as those crucified by the world’s greed, by the world’s neglect.

As we gaze towards heaven, we are full of questions. No answer comes, and the pain is felt more. Just as, on that Good Friday, there was only Silence for Mary, as she held her dead Son. Yet the Silence calls forth a depth of hope we barely imagined possible and our hope fills the silence. For in the story of Jesus’ own agony, in the story of his own hope, we are ultimately reminded that our hope is not in vain. For in the story of Jesus our hope has been given a Promise.

Mercy transforms grief into hope. It looks squarely at death and affirms life; it looks at absence and proclaims presence. Having Mercy means experiencing the pain of bringing the dead to life; of liberating and loosing those who are bound. The Mercy of God is passionate life-giving creativity. It is redemptive love.ⁱⁱ

Pope Francis has told us, *“I believe that this is a time for Mercy. The Church is showing her maternal side, her motherly face to a humanity that is wounded. She does not wait for the wounded to knock on her doors, she looks for them in the streets, she gathers them in, she embraces them, she takes care of them, and she makes them feel loved.”*ⁱⁱⁱ

I invite you to reflect on the above, and ask ourselves does **“Mercy transform grief” for me?**

We also remember to pray for refugee people that have fled their homes, and for those under our own watch in Australia.

***We pray that people generally,
may be more merciful in their attitude to them all.***

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT These prayer reflections were prepared by Sisters Anne McGuire rsm, Celestine Pooley rsm and Patricia McDermott rsm

ⁱ Based on extracts from Mercy, mercy me a heart for the poor? by Anthony McMullen in winter edition 2016 *Madonna Magazine*. www.madonnammagazine.com.au

ⁱⁱ Exerpts from the ‘Reflection – *Hopeful Mercy* by Rev Dr David Ranson VG in ‘Reflections on Mercy:Lectio Divina for Jubilee year of Mercy.’ Praying the scriptures in Lent/year C 2016. Resource by Catholic Diocese of Broken Bay .Website: www.dbb.org.au

ⁱⁱⁱ (Pope Francis in “The name of God is Mercy” is in a conversation with Andrea Torielli in which the latter asks him why ‘ours is a time for mercy’p.6) www.panmacmillan.com.au