

## PRAYER FOCUS FOR MARCH 2016

### *The Year of Mercy*

#### REFLECTION ONE

What an opportunity Pope Francis has given us in the Year of Mercy! As Sisters of Mercy, it is a chance to rediscover and put forth the best of who we are. The year is, of course, an inclusive year for all, and the Pope wants all to be involved. The Year of Mercy began when Pope Francis opened the Door of Mercy. (8<sup>th</sup> of December, 2015-20 November, 2016).



#### **What is the significance of “opening the door of Mercy” you might ask?**

In everyday life we walk through many doors, without recognising that is what we are doing. In the doors that are part of our lives, we might ask, “what is the spirit of hospitality we offer to those who knock. Are we welcoming and gracious, so that the one who knocks feels welcomed and loved? Or do we first check who it might be and even then refuse to open the door?

#### **And what of the door of our own hearts?**

Can we be at home with ourselves and can we sit a while in this space of grace? Do we come face to face with the gratuitous God of mercy who welcomes us unconditionally?

(Excerpt from ‘Opening the door of Mercy’ Anne Ferguson, Mission Animation, Parramatta)



During this time the Holy Father calls the whole Church to grow deeper in awareness of the Father’s merciful and forgiving love, a love that sets us free to be who we are called to be as sons and daughters of God and to bring that mercy to the world.



In his book '*The Church of Mercy*' Pope Francis tells us:

*"it is not simply enough  
to open the (Church) door in welcome...  
but we must go out through that door  
to seek and meet the people."*

Mercy is the most radical of messages in a world where the survival of the fittest and the most unforgiving is the order of the day. Mercy calls for the virtue of humility, for we who know our own salvation depends on God's Mercy to our families, our community, and our nation. Mercy does not require us to turn a blind eye to sin, nor does it deny justice. However, Mercy goes beyond justice and without mercy justice is not complete.

In the Gospel story of Jesus and the adulteress, Jesus recognises the sinfulness of the woman – “Go and sin no more”. Yet he saves her life – despite what the law says is the punishment for adultery. He does so by identifying the sin in the hearts of those who are about to stone her, making it clear that they, too, were in need of God’s Mercy.

- Also you might like to read and reflect on the story of the woman taken in adultery. (John 8:1-11)



Let us take the opportunity in these weeks that mark the beginning of the Year of Mercy to ponder our own experience of **opening doors of Mercy**.

Pope Francis said "**the spiritual and corporate works of Mercy must never be separated**". There are endless small works of mercy we can show to each other, and to strangers who cross our path. Those who are unable to be as active as they once were can also be involved.

**Reflect on these words from a poem by Mary Wickham rsm entitled *The Door of Mercy*:**

*The door of Mercy is double-hinged, swinging in, opening out, sturdy, yet easily moved.*

*My friend says: You have only to knock once, and you only have to knock lightly...*

*Mostly the Door of Mercy stands ajar, in spirit and in flesh you cross its threshold each day, often unmindful, but sometimes, and increasingly, amazed at its potent familiarity...*

*It is not immediately apparent which side is which of the Door of Mercy, since they interchange fluidly, pain and promise etched sharply on both.*

*Blessing is for all who come and go, stay and return, helper and helped, all belonging, each bestowing...*

*The God of Mercy, whose door it is, is always home.*

\* The complete poem '*The Door of Mercy*' can be [READ HERE](#).

As we do not want this Year of Mercy to be only inwardly centered, you are invited to pray for the desperate people in Syria who are **dying because of hunger and malnutrition**, including children, and for the numbers of those **who have died at sea** trying to cross on their way to reach a safe destination. Let us pray that the survivors will find a welcome, and not a closed border.

## REFLECTION TWO

### *The Year of Mercy*



This **Holy Year of Mercy** is a blessing from God, calling us all to acknowledge the mercy we have received from God and to share that mercy with others.

- Share it with our families, where mercy can be found in the smallest of gestures, yet sometimes is the most difficult to show.
- Share it in our parishes and our communities where the pope invites us to put into practice the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, to reach out to those who may feel unloved or unwelcome. Share it in our nation, where the powerful witness of mercy can be an antidote to the anger and bitterness that seems so prevalent.



We find mercy in the psalms and the parables, in the lives of the saints, in the teachings of our present pope, and in the words of the Mass. **We are invited to begin a yearlong reflection on the mercy we have received and the mercy we are being called to live.**

Pope Francis in 'Misericordiae Vultus', the Bull of Indiction of the Jubilee year, speaks of the importance of doing the works of mercy: "**it is my burning desire that during this Jubilee Year of Mercy people may reflect on the spiritual and corporal works of mercy.** It will be a way to reawaken our conscience, too often grown dull in the face of poverty. Let us enter more deeply into the heart of the Gospel where the poor have a special experience of God's mercy. Jesus introduces us to these works of mercy in his preaching so that we can know whether or not we are living as his disciples..." (n.15)

The social dimension of Mercy is perfectly captured by the upcoming Jubilee. "**Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.**"(Luke 6:36)



The corporal works of mercy, with the exception of the last – to bury the dead – are mentioned by Jesus himself in his description of the Last Judgment:

*Then the King will say to those on his right hand, ‘Come, you blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you cared for me, I was in prison and you visited me. (Mt.25:34-36)*

It is in Jesus, who lived, died and rose for us, that we know God's friendship is offered to all people. As the face of the Father's Mercy, Jesus Christ seeks to befriend us and in the Jubilee Year of Mercy to encounter Him, to trust in his promise to carry us into a fullness of life that never ends. God's mercy challenges us to recognise our limitations but at the same time opens us up to the possibilities that God can bring about in our lives, if we allow his merciful and loving grace to shape us.

### How can we live these works of mercy in practice?

By our prayer, conversation and local action our communities can be genuine 'neighbourhoods of grace' at a time when compassion and mercy are most in need. (*Excerpts taken from 'To Be Missionaries of Mercy'* by Daniel Ang, Broken Bay News, Oct., 2015)

- You are invited to read and reflect on the **Gospel of Matthew 25:34-36** quoted above.

### Reflect:

As you continue to remember **prayers for the Syrian people**, you might also like to ponder these thoughts:

*If there is hunger in any part of the world, our celebration of the Eucharist is in some sense incomplete in the whole world.*

*In the Eucharist we receive the hungry Christ into our world. He does not come to us alone, but with the poor, the oppressed, those who are hungry. Through Him, these people come to us in search of love expressed in actions.*

Attributed to Father Pedro Arrupe. sj



## A PRAYER WITH SURVIVORS

Extract from a prayer by Safiyah Fosua

*Today, O God,  
we pray with all who sit in the rubble,  
and live in tents,  
remembering what used to be  
and who used to be there.*

*We pray with them for the courage to look  
forward more than backward  
to days in the future that will be brighter.*

*We pray, O God,  
with all who sew up bodies and patch up limbs,  
with all who gather the bodies of the dead,  
with all who stand as a symbol of peace and stability,  
and with all who offer a cup of cold water in your name.*

*Have mercy upon your people, Lord,  
Lift the downtrodden everywhere, Lord,  
And grant your peace. Amen.*

Source: [http://www.gbod.org/worship/default.asp?act=reader&item\\_id=48445](http://www.gbod.org/worship/default.asp?act=reader&item_id=48445)

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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