

PRAYER FOCUS FOR MONTH OF DECEMBER 2016

Fruits of the Year of Mercy

REFLECTION ONE



As the Year of Mercy draws to a close, has it changed us, and in what way?

If we go back to Pope Francis calling the Year of Mercy, what was his intention?

Although it was called for just one year, his intentions would definitely have been that its lasting effects would be for all time.

So we might examine what have we learnt. That is a question that has to be answered by the individual. But hopefully for us as *Sisters of Mercy* it is especially relevant and has brought us to reflect on the value of Catherine McAuley's naming us as an order that contains '*Mercy*' in its title.

Our merciful God is always there for us with his mercy and forgiveness.

Where would we be without our loving God?

Very early in his reign as Pope, Francis was asked a searching question; “Who is Jorge Mario Bergoglio?” He answered, “I am a sinner.” That answer should be thought through carefully. If I were asked the same question what would my reply be? I can be reasonably sure it would hardly be the same as that, even if we seek to somewhat “play ourselves down”, as it were. But Francis’ response was of the genuinely humble man who would go on to show us this by his consistent example - an example that must continue to challenge us in the way we lead our lives.

Wherever he goes, we see him seeking out the outcast, the homeless, those in prison and countless other people who would otherwise be passed over. He would prefer to dine with them or wash their feet at Mass, or embrace someone who had a disfigurement. In fact he never ceases to amaze us with the way he sought out those of other religious traditions and their followers. We have only to recall when he brought back to the safety of the Vatican, about five Muslim refugees families rescued from war torn areas. The list is long and continues to grow.

Pope Francis is, indeed, a ‘prophet in our midst’, and we should feel so privileged to be alive to witness such a man. He leaves us with an exceptional example of following the way Jesus lived His life here on earth.

You are invited to continue to pray for the troubled parts of the world and the people who are affected so gravely by it and those who have died.

We could well include in our daily prayer a special prayer for Pope Francis, with thanksgiving to God for such a holy man and may we do our best to follow his example.

Lord Jesus Christ,

You have taught us to be merciful like the heavenly Father,

and have told us that whoever sees you sees Him.

Show us your face and we will be saved...

You are the visible face of the invisible Father,

of the God who manifests his power above all by forgiveness and mercy;

let the Church be your visible face in the world, its Lord risen and glorified.

You willed that your ministers would also be clothed in weakness,

in order that they may feel compassion for those in ignorance and error;

let everyone who approaches them feel sought after, loved, and forgiven by God.

(adapted from the Special prayer of Pope Francis for the Jubilee Year of Mercy)

REFLECTION TWO

Fruits learnt from the Year of Mercy



As we continue to reflect on the Year of Mercy, and the blessings it has brought us, we are very grateful to Pope Francis for suggesting to us that we might on reflect on 'mercy' more deeply. Especially it is a call and an opportunity for us as Sisters of Mercy. However, we know that Pope Frances' call was inclusive – it is to all Christians.

Even the year took on a special focus, as we recall how Pope Francis walked through the Holy Door of Mercy in Rome. That holds much meaning for us, as we think about how many doors we have walked through without a second thought. It calls us to a deeper level to 'open the doors of our heart' and that can bring us to a closer union with our God.

In one of his letters the Pope explains how the God we worship is ever loving but also merciful and knows that there will be times – many times - when we let God down. But, Francis tells us, this God knows that we are far from perfect, and can never measure up, but as long as we keep trying our best – that is all that is asked.

But this is no 'cheap grace', for the Pope criticizes not only confessors who are too rigorous, but also the one who is "too lax" who "washes his hands by simply saying, "this is not a sin" – for God is there to heal wounds, not deny they exist.

The God that Francis presents is not only all-loving and all-merciful but never tires of forgiving us – "God's mercy has no limits and especially if the person who asks for mercy does so in contrition and with a sincere heart." That gives us hope in the One who is "rich in mercy" (Eph.2:4), or as St. Paul writes in Romans: "where sin increased, grace abounded all the more."

We often forget the 'bigness' of our God, and hence cut God down to our size!

(This paragraph based on excerpts from article by Stephen Bullivant "I am a sinner."
National Catholic Reporter, America Sept.25, 2013]

The Pope also tells us that Jesus' gaze can change a person's life.

"He always looks at us with love. He asks us something, he forgives us and he gives us a mission."

He uses the example of St. Peter. When Jesus first met this apostle,

"Jesus fixed his gaze upon him and said: "You are Simon, son of John; you will be called Peter."

This was the gaze of mission. Then after Jesus had been arrested and Peter denied him three times, he feels the gaze of Jesus again, and "weeps bitterly." That gaze changed Peter's heart more than the first did... it was a conversion to love. The third gaze is when Jesus looks at Peter and asks if he loves him and tells him to feed his sheep. This gaze confirms Peter's mission but also asks him to confirm his love. He also recounts in the conversation that his future will not be easy and that he also will suffer and die.

We might ask ourselves, how is Jesus gazing on me?

With a call?

With forgiveness?

With a mission?

Excerpts from ["Look of love: Jesus' gaze will change your life"](#)

Pope Francis says:

*Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name, you are mine.
When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned
and the flame shall not consume you.
For I the Lord your God,
the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour...
Because you are precious in my sight, and honoured,
And I love you. (Isaiah 43: 1b-3a,4)*

You are invited to continue to pray for the troubled parts of our world.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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