

## Living the Spirit Father of Mercy

As we come near to the end of this extraordinary Holy Year of Mercy, I would like to share some of my meditations on this great gift to us. Because the Church has been empowered to forgive sin as Jesus told the Apostles on Easter night [“Whose sins you shall forgive ...”] it is clear to the believer that even after all these years from the first Easter there is hope of forgiveness for the sinner. All forgiveness of sin comes from the mercy of God. We who seek God’s mercy are not to be denied it, if only we ask for it with true repentance. Sometimes we must even do so with a courage that is itself the gift of the Spirit.

Let me begin by making clear that there is sin that touches us in the depths of our soul. In our moments of meditation we can rightly declare that we are sinners. For this reason we require the mercy of God. The prayer of the Church reaches to God and the repentant sinner receives the gift of forgiveness. God is merciful.

Whenever man becomes conscious of his unhappy and sinful condition, then is revealed to him, more or less clearly, the face of infinite mercy. The Lord hears the cry of the poor, the ones who seek his help. The Lord desires salvation for all, but sinners must want to receive that happy gift. It is mercy that will bring them back to their senses. Hardened hearts will be moved to experience the mystery of divine tenderness.

As one reads the Scriptures, searching for God’s mercy, one can begin at the very beginning. I think here of how our first parents sinned. The Creator did not demand their annihilation of soul or body for their sin. His punishment was certain, but while there would be death of the body for them and their progeny, the soul would live forever. Indeed, in time mankind would come to know God’s plan for eternal life, with resurrection of the body at the end of the age.

As we read further into the revelation given us, we learn of how God’s mercy was given to His chosen people. It was they who came to believe that God is truly one. But they sinned so often by worshiping other gods. We read of their infidelity and most of us would easily understand that some punishment was deserved. There had to be chastisement, if only to make the sinners repent and be converted. Even this was a giving of divine mercy.

We read of how the mercy of God reached out to the people who knew Him as the one true God. That people cherished in their hearts the conviction of divine mercy, a mercy that was not at all human. “Who is the God like Thee, forgiving iniquities...for He delights in kindness” [Mi, 7]. Can you read the Old Testament and not know of the mercy of God? He is faithful to His covenant. He could not bear the misery of His chosen people.

If you study the story of Jonah, you will find scholars who will assist you in understanding that it reveals that the mercy of God was not only for one chosen people. The meanness of man may have limited it, but the Lord's infinite mercy could not be forever contained and restricted. Over time the mercy of God is seen as a gift for all humanity.

Let me quote from *Biblical Theology*: "At length the unanimous tradition of Israel is summed up magnificently by the psalmist with no hint of particularism: *The Lord is merciful and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in kindness. He will not always chide or hold his anger forever.... As a father is kind to his children, so the Lord is kind to those who revere him. For He knows our frame. He remembers that we are but dust.* (Ps 103)."

Here my meditation comes from this image of God as father. He is a Father of Mercies. One must stop to consider what there is about fatherhood that in the ideal world helps us understand the mercy of God our Father. Certainly we often think of the duty of fathers to chide their children. They must correct the wayward acts of their children. They do so because they love them. They do so to see them safe from dangers. They surely do not hold their anger forever. They try to offer the child who is rebellious a way to be forgiven. [As an aside, I do not exclude mothers from this duty.]

If the story of Jonah teaches us a lesson of how infinite is God's mercy, I like to think that the story of David enhances the image of a generous and forgiving God. We recall how David was chosen to lead the people the Lord had made His own. We delight to see how the youthful David could be victorious over Goliath. Throughout the story we find David always being given powers that defy human ingenuity.

Yet we recall how David sinned in many ways. One was arranging the murder of Uriah. The other was holding a census of the people, something forbidden by the Lord. He repented for both grave sins. He preferred to "fall into the hands of God whose mercy is great, rather than into the hands of man." (2S24, 14)

In this Year we have thought often of God as our Father. We have prayed to Him as Father. We have relished delight that we have been called His adopted sons and daughters. We studied the parable of Jesus who revealed how the Father waits for our return whenever we stray from Him. We have come to know how He runs to meet us by giving us the courage to be converted. When we seek forgiveness of our sins in the Sacrament given us, we hear his representative absolve us of our sins. How happy we are as we receive the embrace of a loving Father, the Father of Mercies!

*May God give you always His merciful love!*

*Monsignor Morrison*

*10/30/16*

*Lord, have mercy! Christ, have mercy! Lord, have mercy!*