

Misericordes Sicut Pater - Merciful like The Father.

As we know, the motto of the Jubilee Year of Mercy is 'Misericordes Sicut Pater.' 'Merciful like the Father.' You may remember that '**miseri**' and '**cor**' come from the Latin for **mercy** and **heart**. I've woven these two words into this talk as the main threads.

To be merciful like the Father means to live in such a way that mercy fills our whole life and it means also to hear God's voice, primarily in the Scriptures. The Pope's motto is 'Miserando atque Eligando' 'in receiving Divine mercy, we are chosen to bring Divine mercy to others'.

We are asked to bring this Mercy to a merciless world of poverty, greed, violence and terrorism. A world, where The Islamic State threatens to turn the hair of adults white when they see the atrocities it plans to perpetrate on little children. Jesus, on the other hand, said, 'Let the little children come to me.' He warned that the one who would scandalise even one of them would be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck. Strong language for Jesus but remember how strong, in action, he could also be when he drove the money changers out of the Temple, accusing them of making his Father's House a den of thieves?



Yet, in his Exhortation, *Misericordia Vultus*, Pope Francis writes that Jesus is the Face of the Father's mercy. He adds, 'Mercy was living and visible in Jesus of Nazareth.' (MV1)

I'd like to reflect on how Jesus is the face of the Father's Mercy and how Mercy was living and visible in Jesus of Nazareth by comparing some of his words and deeds with those of the Father, in the Old Testament. I'd like also to refer to Our Founder's writings on Mercy.

I'll start at the Dawn of Creation when, Adam and Eve brought sin into the world. God expelled them from Paradise but before doing so, God performed the original act of mercy – in Hebrew, **Rachamim** - the mercy of a mother protecting her children. God made leather garments for them and **clothed** them! That reminds me of how Jesus showed the same maternal mercy to the Gerasene Demoniac. The Demoniac had been running around **naked**, howling and gashing himself with stones. Later, when the people came round to see what had happened, they found the Demoniac sitting beside Jesus, '**fully clothed**' and in his right mind.' (Luke:26-39)

In a different way, but acting from the same mercy, Jesus, **clothes** the woman at a Samaritan well, with dignity, as he did with the woman taken in adultery and also the sinful woman who washed his feet with her hair, kissed them and anointed them, at the house of Simon the Pharisee. In His mercy, he forgives their sins and raises them up.

In the Old Testament, The Father grieves at the hardness of **heart** of the Israelites. 'These people honour me with their lips but their **hearts** are far from me.' Their hardness of heart causes the Father, in his loving tender mercy, to cry out, 'How often would I have loved to lift you as a father lifts an infant to his cheek but you wouldn't let me.' The word for Mercy used here is **Chesed** (pronounced "hesed") – a relational love – loving kindness, mercy. We see this reflected in the poignant words of Jesus when he laments over Jerusalem:

'How many times I yearned to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings but you wouldn't let me.' (Luke.13:34. Matt.22:37)

As well as **Chesed**, both quotes reveal the tender loving mercy of a mother for her child. In both cases, their loving kindness and mercy have been rejected. Their mercy, **Rachamim** is a maternal act of a mother protecting her children. Remember it comes from the Hebrew plural word for **womb**. This mercy requires action.

St. Luke tells us that Jesus has compassion, or **Rachamim**, on the multitude because, to him, they looked like lost sheep. That reminds me of the Shepherd image God uses to describe himself in the Old Testament. God denounces the shepherds of Israel for pasturing themselves instead of the sheep. Having enumerated their faults, God goes on to say,



‘I myself will pasture my sheep. The lost I will seek out, the strayed I will bring back, the injured I will bind up, the sick I will heal, shepherding them rightly.’ (Ezekiel.34:15-16) Isn’t this a graphic description of God’s mercy?

The Psalmist, fully aware of this image of God’s mercy sings, ‘The Lord is my Shepherd. There is nothing I shall want.’ (Ps.22 /23) Jesus is also aware of this image. He refers it to himself: ‘I am the good Shepherd.’ He develops it in the Parable of the Lost Sheep. (Luke.15:1-7)

Jesus tells this parable in response to the complaints of the Pharisees and scribes, ‘This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.’ It is a parable to show how he was sent to save sinners. He asks the Pharisees, which one of them if he had lost one sheep out of a 100, would he not leave the 99 in the desert and search for the sheep that was lost until he found it. When he does so, ‘He sets it on his shoulders with great joy and upon his arrival at home, he calls together all his friends and neighbours and says to them, ‘Rejoice with me because I have found my sheep that was lost.’

Jesus adds the famous words: ‘I tell you, in just the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous people who have no need of repentance.’ I wonder, is this a dig at the Pharisees who were complaining, as they considered themselves ‘The Righteous Ones.’ who had no need of repentance?

There is similar rejoicing over the recovery of the woman’s lost coin and think of the great party that the Father threw for his lost son!

As Our Founder was so well versed in the Scriptures, is this why he exhorts us to, ‘Be there as a pardoned sinner who rejoices in the merciful love of God.’?

Like the Father, in the Old Testament, Jesus, too, denounces those in authority, the Pharisees and Scribes, for being false shepherds. He tells the Canaanite woman that he has been sent for the lost sheep of the House of Israel.

Exodus: 34:6. is repeated throughout the Old Testament writings, especially in the Psalms. ‘I am the Lord, the merciful and gracious God, slow to anger and rich in steadfast love and truth.’ I show this steadfast love to many thousands by forgiving them their sins.” This steadfast enduring, covenant, love, **Chesed**, is always connected with forgiveness of sins. We see Jesus revealing this in the Gospels. He alone, like the

Father, possesses this merciful love that can forgive sins. We see this in all his miracles, especially in the healing of the paralytic.

Jesus shows, here, that he has authority to forgive sins and he proves it to the Pharisees by healing the paralytic. He asks them which is easier to say, 'Your sins are forgiven' or 'Rise, take up your bed and walk.' I will prove to you then that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. So he said to the paralysed man, 'I tell you, get up, take up your bed and go home.' 'At once he got up in front of them ..... and went home, praising God.' (Lk.5:17–26)

Incidentally, remember how the paralytic's friends let him down from the roof? Wasn't that an act of love and mercy on their behalf to go to all that trouble? I think their mercy was instrumental in the man's recovery.

We, too, are asked to be merciful, merciful like Jesus who reveals the Father's mercy. 'Be merciful just as your Father is merciful.' (Lk.6:36)

It is through Christ's death and Resurrection that God brought us to life with Christ. God is truly rich in mercy! And so is Jesus.

The heart of Jesus is so moved to mercy that he weeps. His maternal mercy, *Rachamim*, is revealed as he weeps over Jerusalem and thinks of its immanent destruction. (Lk.19:41) Jesus also weeps at the death of Lazarus. When Martha told Mary that the Master had come and was asking for her, Mary ran to him and fell to his feet, saying, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." 'At the sight of her tears and those of the Jews who followed her, Jesus said in great distress, with a sigh that came straight from **the heart**, 'Where have you put him?' They said, 'Lord, come and see.' Jesus wept and the Jews said, 'See how much he loved him.'



One of the main elements in the Jewish Jubilee Year was to free others from debt; to forgive them. Remember the story Jesus told about the servant who refused to do just that? It was because Peter asked Jesus how many times should he forgive that prompted Jesus to tell this parable about a king who decided to settle his accounts. A debtor was brought before him who owed a **large** amount of money. Since he couldn't pay, the master ordered him and his family and all his property to be sold in payment of the debt. The servant begged for time to pay the debt and we are told that the master was moved with compassion – **Rachamim** - and forgave him the whole amount.

Then, the servant found a fellow servant who owed him a **small** amount. He refused to listen to his pleas for mercy but throttled him and had him thrown into prison. The other servants were deeply disturbed and reported this to the Master. He summoned the servant and said, 'You wicked servant, I forgave your entire debt because you begged me to. Should you not have had pity – **Rachamim** – on your fellow servant as I had pity on you?' He handed him over to the torturers until he paid his debt. Jesus concludes, 'So will your Father do to you unless you forgive your brother – sister –from your **heart**.' (Matt. 18:33)

Love always has mercy at heart and where they exist, there is always forgiveness. In this Year of Jubilee, can we think of how we can free others from the debt we think they owe us – the past hurts others have inflicted on us that still wound us? Remember, Our Founder said, 'Kindness heals the hidden wounds of others.' Even more so, the **Chesed**, the loving kindness or mercy of God can heal wounds. Forgiveness is at the heart of mercy.



**The heart** is very important in the Bible as we've seen, in the above passages. Speaking of the heart and mercy, reminds me of the 'Mercy Door' that is open in many places of pilgrimage for people to go through, as a symbol of receiving God's mercy and forgiveness. That reminded me of the Baptists, in America's Deep South, who pray to God's 'Mercy Seat'. The Jubilee Year has a 'Mercy Door', but I thought it is more important that we have a '**Mercy Heart**'.

Our Founder also knew the importance of the heart. He writes about it on several occasions.

'May all (the sisters) without exception become Instruments of mercy in the hand of Divine Providence. That briefly is the greatest wish of my **heart**.'

(Letter 4-8.)

Thankfully, we've responded to his heartfelt wish with by making it our Charism. Elsewhere, he writes:

'Mutual affection must come from God and it must come from **the heart**.'

He also wrote: 'Be united in **heart** and mind so that you find in your sisters – each other – the help that human weakness needs.' In other words be merciful to ones self; be merciful to one another.

I experienced this help just now as I was typing this. Mary came into the room and asked if I would like a mug of coffee. I jumped at the offer as I was desperately trying to finish this talk at the last minute as usual! Mary's offer meant a lot to me. She and the coffee helped me in my need. That reminded me of all Mary's acts of mercy that she performs daily for the homeless and sick in London. Mary came in later to ask me about lunch. Two of the Corporal works of Mercy within one hour!

I was also struck by the help Goretti and Eileen give to the residents of Coloma Court. Last Monday, just before Mass, a lady, in a wheelchair, asked Eileen for a drink. As Eileen bent over the lady, holding the glass to her lips and gently wiping away the water that was dribbling down her chin, I thought of Jesus asking the Samaritan woman for a drink and also of his words, 'what you do to others, you do to me.' It's because of having to think about this talk, that I noticed these acts of kindness and mercy. Before, perhaps I would have taken them for granted.

To return to Our Founder, he prays for us: 'May heavenly grace fall in abundance on all our Religious family and may all, without exception, become instruments of mercy in the hands of Divine Providence.' Isn't it uplifting and heart-warming to know that Our Founder prayed this for each one of us? Perhaps we could pray that for one another as well.



Our Founder's spirituality of mercy is evident in all his writings, as Teresa Clements showed us in her Thesis, but we would be here all day if I were to mention them all.

I just have time to say a little but important word about the Mother of Mercy, who stood at the foot of the Cross, where Jesus gave her to us as our Mother. Mary cares for us today as she did at the Wedding Feast of Cana. She is always aware of our needs and brings them to the attention of her Son. In the *Hail Mary*, we pray that she will be with us at the two most important moments of our lives, now and at the hour of our death.

By the way, I was told that the Churches in Westminster diocese conclude their Intercessions at Mass by praying the *Hail Holy Queen* instead of the *Hail Mary*, during the Jubilee Year. Did you know that the Hail Holy Queen, *Salve Regina*, was composed by Blessed Herman the Cripple? Having been abandoned by his family, he chose Mary as his mother – a mother of mercy. So let us, too, choose her as our mother and ask her to turn her eyes of mercy towards us.

In conclusion, I'd like to add what I read in last Advent's edition of *Walk with Me*.

'The more we pray, the more we learn mercy.  
The more we read the Scriptures, we practise mercy.  
The more we receive the Eucharist, we become mercy.  
The more we celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation,  
We show mercy, because mercy has been shown to us'

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