

THE MERCIFUL LOVE OF GOD FOR US

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"It is 'God, who is rich in mercy' whom Jesus Christ has revealed to us as Father: it is His very Son who, in Himself, has manifested Him and made Him known to us." This is the first line of the second encyclical written by Saint John Paul II, entitled *Dives in Misericordia*. Our God is a God who is rich in mercy. In fact His greatest attribute is His Mercy. He reveals this to a religious sister of the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy, Sister Maria Faustina Kowalska, in Poland. Later on Sr. Maria Faustina will come to be known as St. Faustina, the Apostle of Divine Mercy.



The Lord tells St. Faustina, "Proclaim that mercy is the greatest attribute of God. All the works of my hands are crowned with Mercy" (Diary, 301). "My Heart overflows with compassion and mercy for all" (Diary, 1148). Saint John Paul the II wrote in *"Dives in Misericordia"* (no. 13): "the Bible, Tradition, and the whole faith life of the People of God provide unique proof... that mercy is the greatest of the attributes and perfections of God."

The devotion to Divine Mercy is a call of God to man to come back to Him, to trust in Him, to come close to Him and know of His infinite love for them. This devotion is not something new, in reality as we will see, the knowledge of God's mercy was known in biblical times. For an example we can look at the Gospel of Luke, in the account of the blind man who shouted out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me" (Lk 18, 38). We see how the blind man trusted in God and knew He could cure him and that is why he shouted and continued to shout out to Jesus to have mercy on him. The message of God's Merciful love is for all man and for all ages it is also a message and devotion for us here today.

What is God's mercy? We can define the mercy of God as the response of God who comes to the aid of his children who are weak. No one can demand God's mercy and no one can say they deserve it, it is simply a grace of God's love that He freely pours upon His children. In reality man deserves the divine justice for all his acts and sins against God, but God chooses to reveal himself as the King of Mercy. On one occasion the Lord speaking to St. Faustina said, "My Heart overflows with great mercy for souls, and especially for poor sinners...For them I dwell in the tabernacle as King of Mercy" (Diary 367)

Sin is the greatest misery and being man a sinner he is considered miserable. There is though a very important distinction between misery and the one who is miserable, it is that God hates sin, but not the sinner. God loves man who is miserable and very weak. This love of God for man is defined as Mercy. Mercy is not precisely compassion or pardon; these are the effects of mercy. Divine mercy is an attribute of God that only exists for his children. For God to be merciful there first must be misery. St. Francis de Sales explains this, "Even if God did not create man, He would always be perfect in love, but in reality would not be able to be merciful because mercy can only be exercised for that which is misery or miserable... our misery is the throne of the Mercy of God."

The Divine Mercy of God has been revealed to us throughout all of salvation history. From the first book of the Sacred Scripture, the book of Genesis, man decides to go against God and His will and the Lord gives him the opportunity to amend their fault and return to Him with all their heart. God, who is rich in mercy uses all, even evil actions, to bring about a greater good. We see this with the sin of Adam and Eve. To be merciful with someone, there must first exist misery. God takes this opportunity to reveal to man His infinite love for him, His infinite mercy. We can say that it is through sin that man can know of God's Divine Mercy. In the encyclical *"Dives in Misericordia"*, Venerable John Paul II states: "In the eschatological fulfillment mercy will be revealed as love, while in the temporal phase, in human history, which is at the same time the history of sin and death, love must be revealed above all as mercy and must also be actualized

as mercy" (# 11).

In the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah we see how God calls back His people letting them know that He is merciful, that He forgives their sins: "Go, proclaim these words toward the north, and say: Return, rebel Israel, says the LORD, I will not remain angry with you; For I am merciful, says the LORD, I will not continue my wrath forever. Only know your guilt: how you rebelled against the LORD, your God, How you ran hither and yon to strangers (under every green tree) and would not listen to my voice, says the LORD. Return, rebellious children, says the LORD, for I am your Master;..I will appoint over you shepherds after my own heart, who will shepherd you wisely and prudently." (Jr 3, 12-15).

There are a lot of places in the Old Testament that speak to us or reveal to us the mercy of God towards His people, we see this specially in the Psalms, but I think the Prophet Jonah summarized it well, being frustrated because the Lord forgave the people of Ninive, after they believed and repented, he says to the Lord: "I beseech you, LORD,...is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? This is why I fled at first to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger, rich in clemency, loathe to punish."

The entire book of the Prophet Jonah prepares us for the Gospel presentation of God who is Love. The New Testament reveals to us the merciful love of the Holy Trinity. In the New Testament we learn that God is mercy and we also learn that we too must be merciful. The greatest act of divine mercy is that God sent His only Son to the world for our salvation. The word became incarnate so that we may know the love of God: "In this way the love of God was revealed to us: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might have life through him. In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins" (1 Jn, 4:9-10). All powerful God intervened in the world of the prophets for the salvation of His people, but He knew that for the salvation of men He had to do a greater act. In His wisdom and infinite love, He sends His Son, Jesus Christ. He sent Jesus so that through His death we may have life and following His life and example and with His grace, man would be capable of salvation. "The love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the holy Spirit that has been given to us. For Christ, while we were still helpless, yet died at the appointed time for the ungodly. Indeed, only with difficulty does one die for a just person, though perhaps for a good person one might even find courage to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us" (Rm 5, 5-8).

Jesus Christ reveals to us the love of God for His children through parables, His actions, in the institution of the sacrament of penance and in the institution of the Holy Eucharist. "Especially through His lifestyle and through His actions, Jesus revealed that love is present in the world in which we live - an effective love, a love that addresses itself to man and embraces everything that makes up his humanity. This love makes itself particularly noticed in contact with suffering, injustice and poverty - in contact with the whole historical "human condition," which in various ways manifests man's limitation and frailty, both physical and moral. It is precisely the mode and sphere in which love manifests itself that in biblical language is called 'mercy'" (Dives, 3)

Jesus crucifixion and death speak to us about the infinite mercy of God. "For our sake he made him to be sin who did not know sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him" (2 Cor 5, 21). Christ died for our sins. In His passion and death "absolute justice is expressed, for Christ undergoes the passion and cross because of the sins of humanity. This constitutes even a "superabundance" of justice, for the sins of man are "compensated for" by the sacrifice of the Man-God. Nevertheless, this justice, which is properly justice "to God's measure," springs completely from love: from the love of the Father and of the Son, and completely bears fruit in love" (Dives, 7). The sacrifice of the Lord was not only in the cross; this was the culmination of His sacrifice. In reality from the moment of His conception, His martyrdom began, but His sacrifice did not end in the cross either, Christ wished to immortalize His sacrifice staying with us in the Holy Eucharist until the end of times. "And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age" (Mt 20:28).

Throughout the history of the Church we find many saints who speak and proclaim the mercy of God. Many of the Church fathers are quoted saying, "Jesus saved the good thief at the last hour of his death, so that we who are sinners will never doubt the mercy of God. St. John Chrysostom explains that all that God does is

derived from his mercy and clemency. St. Augustine says, "God is so just and patient with His children, that not even the heretic must distrust of His mercy nor run away from Him, for even the most rotten of God's creatures, when they come into contact with God their bones will flourish."

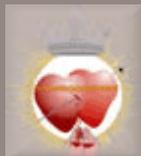
St. Margaret Mary Alacoque, in the seventeenth century, directed our gaze the to the Sacred Heart of Jesus to find the ineffable love of Divine Love. God told St. Margaret Mary "sinners will find in My Heart and ocean of Mercy". St. Therese of the Child Jesus wrote in one of her letters, "Ever since I have been given the grace to understand also the love of the Heart of Jesus, I admit that is has expelled all fears from my heart. The remembrance of my faults humbles me, draws me never to depend on my strength which is only weakness, but this remembrance speaks to me of mercy and love even more" (June 21, 1897). There have been many saints, blessed, and lay who throughout the centuries have recognized and proclaimed the mercy of God. But, it was in the XX century, in which the Lord called forth his own Apostle of Divine Mercy, He wanted His own secretary of mercy, and He chose St. Maria Faustina to be so. The Lord told St. Faustina, "You will prepare the world for my final coming" (Diary, 429) and "the rays of mercy will pass through you...and they will go out through all the world" (Diary, 441). On another occasion the Lord tells St. Faustina: "My daughter, know that My Heart is mercy itself. From this sea of mercy, graces flow out upon the whole world. No soul that has approached Me has ever gone away unconsolated. All misery gets buried in the depths of My mercy, and every saving and sanctifying grace flows from this fountain..." (Diary, 1777).

"My mercy is greater than your sins and those of the entire world. Who can measure the extent of my goodness? For you I descended from heaven to earth; for you I allowed myself to be nailed to the cross; for you I let my Sacred Heart be pierced with a lance, thus opening wide the source of mercy for you. Come, then, with trust to draw graces from this fountain. I never reject a contrite heart. Your misery has disappeared in the depths of My mercy" (Diary, 1485).

Psalm 22 is quoted in the New Testament as a prophecy that would happen to Jesus, in verse 15 we read, "My heart has become like wax, it melts away within me". The Lord's Heart out of His immense love for us has become like wax, has melted within Him so that at the time of His death, when the soldier pierced His side, His infinite mercy would become visible for all. "One soldier thrust his lance into his side, and immediately blood and water flowed out" (Jn 19, 34). God could not contain His love and mercy for us anymore and therefore He gives Himself totally to us from the cross. Let us not waste this precious gift of God's Mercy. Let us trust in God's mercy with all our hearts and run to His fountain of mercy, His Pierced Heart.

Let us hear God's plea, spoken to St. Faustina, but really said to all of us: "My Heart overflows with great mercy for souls, and especially for poor sinners. If only they could understand that I am the best of Fathers to them and that it is for them that the Blood and Water flowed from My Heart as from a fount overflowing with mercy. For them I dwell in the tabernacle as King of Mercy. I desire to bestow My graces upon souls, but they do not want to accept them. You, at least, come to Me as often as possible and take these graces they do not want to accept. In this way you will console My Heart..." (Diary, 367).

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