

## **RESOURCES FOR DIVINE MERCY SUNDAY**

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# DIVINE MERCY SUNDAY

From the diary of a young Polish nun, a special devotion began spreading throughout the world in the 1930s. The message is nothing new, but is a reminder of what the Church has always taught through scripture and tradition: that God is merciful and forgiving and that we, too, must show mercy and forgiveness. But in the Divine Mercy devotion, the message takes on a powerful new focus, calling people to a deeper understanding that God's love is unlimited and available to everyone.

The message and devotion to Jesus as The Divine Mercy is based on the writings of Saint Faustina Kowalska, a Polish nun who, in obedience to her spiritual director, wrote a diary of about 600 pages recording the revelations she received about God's mercy. Even before her death in 1938, the devotion to The Divine Mercy had begun to spread.

The message of mercy is that God loves us — all of us —no matter how great our sins. He wants us to recognize that His mercy is greater than our sins, so that we will call upon Him with trust, receive His mercy, and let it flow through us to others. Thus, all will come to share His joy.

(Cover image: Word on Fire)

## THE IMAGE OF THE DIVINE MERCY



Jesus, I trust in You

In 1931, our Lord appeared to St. Faustina in a vision. She saw Jesus clothed in a white garment with His right hand raised in blessing. His left hand was touching His garment in the area of the Heart, from where two large rays came forth, one red and the other pale. She gazed intently at the Lord in silence, her soul filled with awe, but also with great joy. Jesus said to her:

*Paint an image according to the pattern you see, with the signature: Jesus, I trust in You. I promise that the soul that will venerate this image will not perish. I also promise victory over [its] enemies already here on earth, especially at the hour of death. I Myself will defend it as My own glory (Diary, 47, 48). I am offering people a vessel with which they are to keep coming for graces to the fountain of mercy. That vessel is this image with the signature: Jesus, I trust in You (327). I desire that this image be venerated, first in your chapel, and [then] throughout the world (47).*

At the request of her spiritual director, St. Faustina asked the Lord about the meaning of the rays in the image. She heard these words in reply:

*The two rays denote Blood and Water. The pale ray stands for the Water which makes souls righteous. The red ray stands for the Blood which is the life of souls. These two rays issued forth from the depths of My tender mercy when My agonized Heart was opened by a lance on the Cross. Happy is the one who will dwell in their shelter, for the just hand of God shall not lay hold of him (299). By means of this image I shall grant many graces to souls. It is to be a reminder of the demands of My mercy, because even the strongest faith is of no avail without works (742).*

These words indicate that the Image represents the graces of Divine Mercy poured out upon the world, especially through Baptism and the Eucharist.

Many different versions of this image have been painted, but our Lord made it clear that the painting itself is not what is important. When St. Faustina first saw the original image that was being painted under her direction, she wept in disappointment and complained to Jesus: *"Who will paint You as beautiful as You are?" (313).*

In answer, she heard these words: *"Not in the beauty of the colour, nor of the brush lies the greatness of this image, but in My grace" (313).*

(Further resources: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4kZw3GAsn9c&t=20s>)

## THE DIVINE MERCY MESSAGE AND DEVOTION

The message of The Divine Mercy is simple. It is that God loves us – all of us. And, He wants us to recognize that His mercy is greater than our sins, so that we will call upon Him with trust, receive His mercy, and let it flow through us to others. Thus, all will come to share His joy.

The Divine Mercy message is one we can call to mind simply by remembering ABC:

**A** - Ask for His Mercy. God wants us to approach Him in prayer constantly, repenting of our sins and asking Him to pour His mercy out upon us and upon the whole world.

**B** - Be merciful. God wants us to receive His mercy and let it flow through us to others. He wants us to extend love and forgiveness to others just as He does to us.

**C** - Completely trust in Jesus. God wants us to know that all the graces of His mercy can only be received by our trust. The more we open the door of our hearts and lives to Him with trust, the more we can receive.



*Divine Mercy Image Vilnius*

This message and devotion to Jesus as The Divine Mercy is based on the writings of Saint Faustina Kowalska, an uneducated Polish nun who, in obedience to her spiritual director, wrote a diary of about 600 pages recording the revelations she received about God's mercy. Even before her death in 1938, the devotion to The Divine Mercy had begun to spread.

The message and devotional practices proposed in the Diary of Saint Faustina and set forth in this web site and other publications of the Marians of the Immaculate Conception are completely in accordance with the teachings of Church and are firmly rooted in the Gospel message of our Merciful Saviour. Properly understood and implemented, they will help us grow as genuine followers of Christ.

Spend time to learn more about the mercy of God, learn to trust in Jesus, and live your life as merciful to others, as Christ is merciful to you.

## HOW TO PRAY THE CHAPLET OF DIVINE MERCY

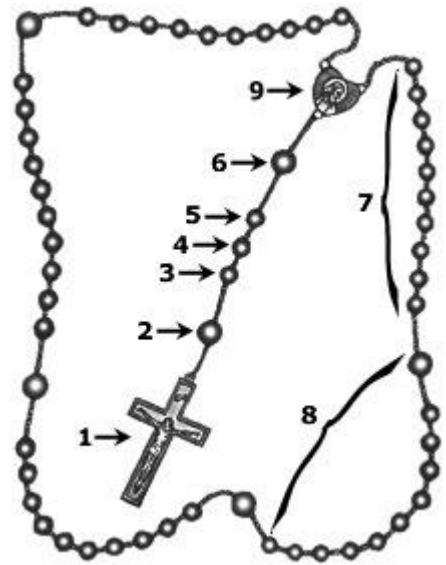
### 1. Make the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### 2. Optional Opening Prayers

#### St. Faustina's Prayer for Sinners

O Jesus, eternal Truth, our Life, I call upon You and I beg Your mercy for poor sinners. O sweetest Heart of my Lord, full of pity and unfathomable mercy, I plead with You for poor sinners. O Most Sacred Heart, Fount of Mercy from which gush forth rays of inconceivable graces upon the entire human race, I beg of You light for poor sinners. O Jesus, be mindful of Your own bitter Passion and do not permit the loss of souls redeemed at so dear a price of Your most precious Blood. O Jesus, when I consider the great price of Your Blood, I rejoice at its immensity, for one drop alone would have been enough for the salvation of all sinners. Although sin is an abyss of wickedness and ingratitude, the price paid for us can never be equalled. Therefore, let every soul trust in the Passion of the Lord, and place its hope in His mercy. God will not deny His mercy to anyone. Heaven and earth may change, but God's mercy will never be exhausted. Oh, what immense joy burns in my heart when I contemplate Your incomprehensible goodness, O Jesus! I desire to bring all sinners to Your feet that they may glorify Your mercy throughout endless ages (Diary of Saint Maria Faustina Kowalska, 72).



You expired, Jesus, but the source of life gushed forth for souls, and the ocean of mercy opened up for the whole world. O Fount of Life, unfathomable Divine Mercy, envelop the whole world and empty Yourself out upon us.

(Repeat three times)

O Blood and Water, which gushed forth from the Heart of Jesus as a fount of mercy for us, I trust in You!

### 3. Our Father

Our Father, Who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and

forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, Amen.

#### **4. Hail Mary**

Hail Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death, Amen.

#### **5. The Apostles' Creed**

I believe in God, the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried; He descended into hell; on the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty; from there He will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.

#### **6. The Eternal Father**

Eternal Father, I offer you the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Your Dearly Beloved Son, Our Lord, Jesus Christ, in atonement for our sins and those of the whole world.

#### **7. On the 10 Small Beads of Each Decade**

For the sake of His sorrowful Passion, have mercy on us and on the whole world.

#### **8. Repeat for the remaining decades**

Saying the "Eternal Father" (6) on the "Our Father" bead and then 10 "For the sake of His sorrowful Passion" (7) on the following "Hail Mary" beads.

#### **9. Conclude with Holy God (Repeat three times)**

Holy God, Holy Mighty One, Holy Immortal One, have mercy on us and on the whole world.

#### **10. Optional Closing Prayers**

Eternal God, in whom mercy is endless and the treasury of compassion — inexhaustible, look kindly upon us and increase Your mercy in us, that in difficult

moments we might not despair nor become despondent, but with great confidence submit ourselves to Your holy will, which is Love and Mercy itself.

O Greatly Merciful God, Infinite Goodness, today all mankind calls out from the abyss of its misery to Your mercy — to Your compassion, O God; and it is with its mighty voice of misery that it cries out. Gracious God, do not reject the prayer of this earth's exiles! O Lord, Goodness beyond our understanding, Who are acquainted with our misery through and through, and know that by our own power we cannot ascend to You, we implore You: anticipate us with Your grace and keep on increasing Your mercy in us, that we may faithfully do Your holy will all through our life and at death's hour. Let the omnipotence of Your mercy shield us from the darts of our salvation's enemies, that we may with confidence, as Your children, await Your [Son's] final coming — that day known to You alone. And we expect to obtain everything promised us by Jesus in spite of all our wretchedness. For Jesus is our Hope: through His merciful Heart, as through an open gate, we pass through to heaven (Diary, 1570).

(Source: The Divine Mercy – Marian Fathers)

# Eucharistic Holy Hour for Divine Mercy Sunday

*[The following Holy Hour is a basic model with suggested readings and prayers for this time. Other suitable prayers may be used by the presiding minister.]*

## **Procession/Exposition**

### **Opening Hymn**

“O Salutaris Hostia” or another suitable Eucharistic hymn

### **Opening Prayer**

Presiding Minister:

Lord our God,

in this great sacrament we come into the presence of Jesus Christ, your Son,  
born of the Virgin Mary and crucified for our salvation.

May we who declare our faith in this fountain of love and mercy  
drink from it the water of everlasting life.

Through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

### **Liturgy of the Word**

(Select 1 or 2 readings and a passage from Luke’s Gospel or a similar passage illustrating God’s merciful love)

Jn 4:1–11 (LFM 463) And should I not pity Nineveh?

Psalm 103:1–14 (LFM 377) The Lord is kind and merciful

1 Pt 1:3–9 (LFM 347) The death and resurrection of Jesus has won us the hope  
of salvation

Eph 2:4–10 (LFM 32) God, who is rich in mercy, brought us to life in Christ

Rom 5:6–11 (LFM 91) Christ died for us while we were still sinners

Lk 15:3–7 (LFM 172) The Parable of the Lost Sheep

Lk 15:1–3, 11–32 (LFM 33) The Parable of the Prodigal Son



### **Reflection/meditation on God's merciful love for mankind**

The Presiding Minister may offer insights on the revelation of God's mercy throughout salvation history—in Scripture, through the writings of saints and, in a particular way, through the revelations recorded in the Diary of St. Faustina Kowalska.

### **Period of Silent Reflection and Adoration**

### **Recitation of the Chaplet of Divine Mercy**

#### **Intercessions**

Presiding Minister:

God is the Father of all mercies. In him we place our faith as we pray the following petitions:

For our Holy Father, Pope Francis, bishops, priests, and all the faithful:  
that in this Year of Faith, each will bear witness to the love and mercy of God;  
Lord, hear us.

For all who have committed grave sin and who are afraid to go to confession:  
that their fears will dissolve in the face of Jesus' longing to forgive and be  
reconciled to them;  
Lord, hear us.

For those who serve in public office:  
that they govern with true compassion for the lives of the most vulnerable among  
us—  
especially unborn children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities;  
Lord, hear us.

For parents:  
that, by their guidance and the witness of their own lives,  
they will teach their children how to love and forgive when they have been  
wronged;  
Lord, hear us.

For the protection of conscience rights and religious liberty,  
and that all people of good will may work together  
against the increasing threats to these fundamental rights;  
Lord, hear us.

For peace throughout the world, and especially in areas of open conflict:  
that ancient prejudices and hatreds will be replaced by a spirit of mercy and  
brotherhood;  
Lord, hear us.

**Presiding Minister:**

Almighty and merciful Father, we give you thanks for all of your many blessings,  
and we ask you to hear these petitions in the name of your Son, our Lord and  
Saviour Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever.

All: Amen.

### **Benediction**

“Tantum ergo” or another suitable Eucharistic song is sung as the presider  
incenses the Blessed Sacrament.

### **Presiding Minister:**

Let us pray.

O God, who in this wonderful Sacrament  
have left us a memorial of your Passion,  
grant us, we pray,  
so to revere the sacred mysteries of your Body and Blood  
that we may always experience in ourselves  
the fruits of your redemption.

Who live and reign for ever and ever.

All: Amen.

### **Reposition**

#### **Divine Praises**

Blessed be God.

Blessed be his Holy Name.

Blessed be Jesus Christ, true God and true man.

Blessed be the Name of Jesus.

Blessed be his Most Sacred Heart.

Blessed be his Most Precious Blood.

Blessed be Jesus in the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar.

Blessed be the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete.

Blessed be the great Mother of God, Mary most holy.  
Blessed be her holy and Immaculate Conception.  
Blessed be her glorious Assumption.  
Blessed be the name of Mary, Virgin and Mother.  
Blessed be St. Joseph, her most chaste spouse.  
Blessed be God in his angels and in his Saints.

**Closing Hymn**

“Holy God, We Praise Thy Name” or another suitable hymn.

(Source: USCCB, 2012)

## DIVINE MERCY NOVENA

### Day 1

*“Today bring to Me all mankind, especially all sinners, and immerse them in the ocean of My mercy. In this way you will console Me in the bitter grief into which the loss of souls plunges Me.”*

Most Merciful Jesus, whose very nature it is to have compassion on us and to forgive us, do not look upon our sins but upon our trust which we place in Your infinite goodness. Receive us all into the abode of Your Most Compassionate Heart, and never let us escape from it. We beg this of You by Your love which unites You to the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Eternal Father, turn Your merciful gaze upon all mankind and especially upon poor sinners, all enfolded in the Most Compassionate Heart of Jesus. For the sake of His sorrowful Passion show us Your mercy, that we may praise the omnipotence of Your mercy for ever and ever. Amen.

### Day 2

*“Today bring to Me the Souls of Priests and Religious, and immerse them in My unfathomable mercy. It was they who gave me strength to endure My bitter Passion. Through them as through channels My mercy flows out upon mankind.”*

Most Merciful Jesus, from whom comes all that is good, increase Your grace in men and women consecrated to Your service, that they may perform worthy works of mercy; and that all who see them may glorify the Father of Mercy who is in heaven.

Eternal Father, turn Your merciful gaze upon the company of chosen ones in Your vineyard — upon the souls of priests and religious; and endow them with the strength of Your blessing. For the love of the Heart of Your Son in which they are enfolded, impart to them Your power and light, that they may be able to guide others in the way of salvation and with one voice sing praise to Your boundless mercy for ages without end. Amen.

### Day 3

*“Today bring to Me all Devout and Faithful Souls, and immerse them in the ocean of My mercy. These souls brought me consolation on the Way of the Cross. They were a drop of consolation in the midst of an ocean of bitterness.”*

Most Merciful Jesus, from the treasury of Your mercy, You impart Your graces in great abundance to each and all. Receive us into the abode of Your Most Compassionate Heart and never let us escape from It. We beg this grace of You by that most wondrous love for the heavenly Father with which Your Heart burns so fiercely.

Eternal Father, turn Your merciful gaze upon faithful souls, as upon the inheritance of Your Son. For the sake of His sorrowful Passion, grant them Your blessing and surround them with Your constant protection. Thus may they never fail in love or lose the treasure of the holy faith, but rather, with all the hosts of Angels and Saints, may they glorify Your boundless mercy for endless ages.

Amen.

#### **Day 4**

*“Today bring to Me those who do not believe in God and those who do not know Me, I was thinking also of them during My bitter Passion, and their future zeal comforted My Heart. Immerse them in the ocean of My mercy.”*

Most compassionate Jesus, You are the Light of the whole world. Receive into the abode of Your Most Compassionate Heart the souls of those who do not believe in God and of those who as yet do not know You. Let the rays of Your grace enlighten them that they, too, together with us, may extol Your wonderful mercy; and do not let them escape from the abode which is Your Most Compassionate Heart.

Eternal Father, turn Your merciful gaze upon the souls of those who do not believe in You, and of those who as yet do not know You, but who are enclosed in the Most Compassionate Heart of Jesus. Draw them to the light of the Gospel. These souls do not know what great happiness it is to love You. Grant that they, too, may extol the generosity of Your mercy for endless ages. Amen.

## Day 5

*“Today bring to Me the Souls of those who have separated themselves from My Church, and immerse them in the ocean of My mercy. During My bitter Passion they tore at My Body and Heart, that is, My Church. As they return to unity with the Church My wounds heal and in this way they alleviate My Passion.”*

Most Merciful Jesus, Goodness Itself, You do not refuse light to those who seek it of You. Receive into the abode of Your Most Compassionate Heart the souls of those who have separated themselves from Your Church. Draw them by Your light into the unity of the Church, and do not let them escape from the abode of Your Most Compassionate Heart; but bring it about that they, too, come to glorify the generosity of Your mercy.

Eternal Father, turn Your merciful gaze upon the souls of those who have separated themselves from Your Son’s Church, who have squandered Your blessings and misused Your graces by obstinately persisting in their errors. Do not look upon their errors, but upon the love of Your own Son and upon His bitter Passion, which He underwent for their sake, since they, too, are enclosed in His Most Compassionate Heart. Bring it about that they also may glorify Your great mercy for endless ages. Amen.

## Day 6

*“Today bring to Me the Meek and Humble Souls and the Souls of Little Children, and immerse them in My mercy. These souls most closely resemble My Heart. They strengthened Me during My bitter agony. I saw them as earthly Angels, who will keep vigil at My altars. I pour out upon them whole torrents of grace. I favour humble souls with My confidence.”*

Most Merciful Jesus, You yourself have said, “Learn from Me for I am meek and humble of heart.” Receive into the abode of Your Most Compassionate Heart all meek and humble souls and the souls of little children. These souls send all heaven into ecstasy and they are the heavenly Father’s favourites. They are a sweet-smelling bouquet before the throne of God; God Himself takes delight in their fragrance. These souls have a permanent abode in Your Most Compassionate Heart, O Jesus, and they unceasingly sing out a hymn of love and mercy.

Eternal Father, turn Your merciful gaze upon meek souls, upon humble souls, and upon little children who are enfolded in the abode which is the Most Compassionate Heart of Jesus. These souls bear the closest resemblance to Your Son. Their fragrance rises from the earth and reaches Your very throne. Father of mercy and of all goodness, I beg You by the love You bear these souls and by the delight You take in them: Bless the whole world, that all souls together may sing out the praises of Your mercy for endless ages. Amen.

### **Day 7**

*“Today bring to Me the Souls who especially venerate and glorify My Mercy, and immerse them in My mercy. These souls sorrowed most over my Passion and entered most deeply into My spirit. They are living images of My Compassionate Heart. These souls will shine with a special brightness in the next life. Not one of them will go into the fire of hell. I shall particularly defend each one of them at the hour of death.”*

Most Merciful Jesus, whose Heart is Love Itself, receive into the abode of Your Most Compassionate Heart the souls of those who particularly extol and venerate the greatness of Your mercy. These souls are mighty with the very power of God Himself. In the midst of all afflictions and adversities they go forward, confident of Your mercy; and united to You, O Jesus, they carry all mankind on their shoulders. These souls will not be judged severely, but Your mercy will embrace them as they depart from this life.

Eternal Father, turn Your merciful gaze upon the souls who glorify and venerate Your greatest attribute, that of Your fathomless mercy, and who are enclosed in the Most Compassionate Heart of Jesus. These souls are a living Gospel; their hands are full of deeds of mercy, and their hearts, overflowing with joy, sing a canticle of mercy to You, O Most High! I beg You O God:

Show them Your mercy according to the hope and trust they have placed in You. Let there be accomplished in them the promise of Jesus, who said to them that during their life, but especially at the hour of death, the souls who will venerate this fathomless mercy of His, He, Himself, will defend as His glory. Amen

### **Day 8**

*“Today bring to Me the Souls who are in the prison of Purgatory, and immerse them in the abyss of My mercy. Let the torrents of My Blood cool down their scorching flames. All these souls are greatly loved by Me. They are making retribution to My justice. It is in your power to bring them relief. Draw all the indulgences from the treasury of My Church and offer them on their behalf. Oh, if you only knew the torments they suffer, you would continually offer for them the alms of the spirit and pay off their debt to My justice.”*

Most Merciful Jesus, You Yourself have said that You desire mercy; so I bring into the abode of Your Most Compassionate Heart the souls in Purgatory, souls who are very dear to You, and yet, who must make retribution to Your justice. May the streams of Blood and Water which gushed forth from Your Heart put out the flames of Purgatory, that there, too, the power of Your mercy may be celebrated.

Eternal Father, turn Your merciful gaze upon the souls suffering in Purgatory, who are enfolded in the Most Compassionate Heart of Jesus. I beg You, by the sorrowful Passion of Jesus Your Son, and by all the bitterness with which His most sacred Soul was flooded: Manifest Your mercy to the souls who are under Your just scrutiny. Look upon them in no other way but only through the Wounds of Jesus, Your dearly beloved Son; for we firmly believe that there is no limit to Your goodness and compassion. O Amen.

## **Day 9**

*“Today bring to Me the Souls who have become Lukewarm, and immerse them in the abyss of My mercy. These souls wound My Heart most painfully. My soul suffered the most dreadful loathing in the Garden of Olives because of lukewarm souls. They were the reason I cried out: ‘Father, take this cup away from Me, if it be Your will.’ For them, the last hope of salvation is to run to My mercy.”*

Most compassionate Jesus, You are Compassion Itself. I bring lukewarm souls into the abode of Your Most Compassionate Heart. In this fire of Your pure love, let these tepid souls who, like corpses, filled You with such deep loathing, be once again set aflame. O Most Compassionate Jesus, exercise the omnipotence of Your mercy and draw them into the very ardour of Your love, and bestow upon them the gift of holy love, for nothing is beyond Your power.

Eternal Father, turn Your merciful gaze upon lukewarm souls who are nonetheless enfolded in the Most Compassionate Heart of Jesus. Father of Mercy, I beg You



by the bitter Passion of Your Son and by His three-hour agony on the Cross: Let them, too, glorify the abyss of Your mercy. Amen.

(Source: [www.godsquad.ca](http://www.godsquad.ca))

## **APOSTOLIC LETTER**

*Misericordia et misera*

### **OF THE HOLY FATHER FRANCIS AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE EXTRAORDINARY JUBILEE OF MERCY**

**Francis**  
**to all who read this Apostolic Letter**  
**mercy and peace**

*Misericordia et misera* is a phrase used by Saint Augustine in recounting the story of Jesus' meeting with the woman taken in adultery (cf. Jn 8:1-11). It would be difficult to imagine a more beautiful or apt way of expressing the mystery of God's love when it touches the sinner: "the two of them alone remained: mercy with misery".[1] What great mercy and divine justice shine forth in this narrative! Its teaching serves not only to throw light on the conclusion of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, but also to point out the path that we are called to follow in the future.

1. This page of the Gospel could easily serve as an icon of what we have celebrated during the Holy Year, a time rich in mercy, which must continue to be celebrated and lived out in our communities. Mercy cannot become a mere parenthesis in the life of the Church; it constitutes her very existence, through which the profound truths of the Gospel are made manifest and tangible. Everything is revealed in mercy; everything is resolved in the merciful love of the Father.

A woman and Jesus meet. She is an adulteress and, in the eyes of the Law, liable to be stoned. Jesus, through his preaching and the total gift of himself that would lead him to the Cross, returned the Mosaic Law to its true and original intent. Here what is central is not the law or legal justice, but the love of God, which is capable of looking into the heart of each person and seeing the deepest desire hidden there; God's love must take primacy over all else. This Gospel account, however, is not an encounter of sin and judgement in the abstract, but of a sinner and her Saviour. Jesus looked that woman in the eye and read in her heart a desire to be understood, forgiven and set free. The misery of sin was clothed with the mercy of

love. Jesus' only judgement is one filled with mercy and compassion for the condition of this sinner. To those who wished to judge and condemn her to death, Jesus replies with a lengthy silence. His purpose was to let God's voice be heard in the consciences not only of the woman, but also in those of her accusers, who drop their stones and one by one leave the scene (cf. Jn 8:9). Jesus then says: "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?... Neither do I condemn you. Go your way and from now on do not sin again" (vv. 10-11). Jesus helps the woman to look to the future with hope and to make a new start in life. Henceforth, if she so desires, she can "walk in charity" (Eph 5:2). Once clothed in mercy, even if the inclination to sin remains, it is overcome by the love that makes it possible for her to look ahead and to live her life differently.

2. Jesus had taught this clearly on another occasion, when he had been invited to dine at the home of a Pharisee and a woman, known by everyone to be a sinner, approached him (cf. Lk 7:36-50). She poured perfume over his feet, bathed them with her tears and dried them with her hair (cf. vv. 37-38). To the scandalized reaction of the Pharisee, Jesus replied: "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little" (v. 47).

Forgiveness is the most visible sign of the Father's love, which Jesus sought to reveal by his entire life. Every page of the Gospel is marked by this imperative of a love that loves to the point of forgiveness. Even at the last moment of his earthly life, as he was being nailed to the cross, Jesus spoke words of forgiveness: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Lk 23:34).

Nothing of what a repentant sinner places before God's mercy can be excluded from the embrace of his forgiveness. For this reason, none of us has the right to make forgiveness conditional.

Mercy is always a gratuitous act of our heavenly Father, an unconditional and unmerited act of love. Consequently, we cannot risk opposing the full freedom of the love with which God enters into the life of every person. Mercy is this concrete action of love that, by forgiving, transforms and changes our lives. In this way, the divine mystery of mercy is made manifest. God is merciful (cf. Ex 34:6); his mercy lasts for ever (cf. Ps 136). From generation to generation, it embraces all those who trust in him and it changes them, by bestowing a share in his very life.

3. What great joy welled up in the heart of these two women: the adulteress and the sinner! Forgiveness made them feel free at last and happy as never before. Their tears of shame and pain turned into the smile of a person who knows that he or she is loved. Mercy gives rise to joy, because our hearts are opened to the hope of a new life. The joy of forgiveness is inexpressible, yet it radiates all around us whenever we experience forgiveness. Its source is in the love with which God comes to meet us, breaking through walls of selfishness that surround us, in order to make us in turn instruments of mercy.

How meaningful in this regard for us too are the ancient words which guided the first Christians: “Clothe yourselves in joy, which always is agreeable and acceptable to God, and rejoice in it. For all who are joyful do what is good, think what is good, and despise sadness... All who put aside sadness and put on joy will live in God”.<sup>[2]</sup> The experience of mercy brings joy. May we never allow this joy to be robbed from us by our troubles and concerns. May it remain rooted in our hearts and enable us to approach with serenity the events of our daily lives.

In a culture often dominated by technology, sadness and loneliness appear to be on the rise, not least among young people. The future seems prey to an uncertainty that does not make for stability. This often gives rise to depression, sadness and boredom, which can gradually lead to despair. We need witnesses to hope and true joy if we are to dispel the illusions that promise quick and easy happiness through artificial paradises. The profound sense of emptiness felt by so many people can be overcome by the hope we bear in our hearts and by the joy that it gives. We need to acknowledge the joy that rises up in a heart touched by mercy. Let us keep in mind, then, the words of the Apostle: “Rejoice in the Lord always” (Phil 4:4; cf. 1 Thess 5:16)

4. We have celebrated an intense Jubilee Year in which we have received the grace of mercy in abundance. Like a gusting but wholesome wind, the Lord’s goodness and mercy have been poured out upon the entire world. Because each of us has experienced at length this loving gaze of God, we cannot remain unaffected, for it changes our lives.

We feel the need above all to thank the Lord and to tell him: “Lord, you have been favourable to your land... You have forgiven the iniquity of your people” (Ps 85:1-2). So it is. God has subdued our iniquities and cast all our sins into the depths of the sea (cf. Mic 7:19). He no longer remembers them, since he has cast them

behind his back (cf. Is 38:17). As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us (cf. Ps 103:12).

In this Holy Year, the Church listened attentively and experienced intensely the presence and closeness of the Father, who with the Holy Spirit has enabled her to see with greater clarity the gift and mandate of Jesus Christ regarding forgiveness. It has truly been like a new visitation of the Lord among us. We have felt his life-giving breath poured out upon the Church and, once again, his words have pointed out our mission: “Receive the Holy Spirit: if you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained” (Jn 20:22-23).

5. Now, at the conclusion of this Jubilee, it is time to look to the future and to understand how best to continue, with joy, fidelity and enthusiasm, experiencing the richness of divine mercy. Our communities can remain alive and active in the work of the new evangelization in the measure that the “pastoral conversion” to which we are called<sup>[3]</sup> will be shaped daily by the renewing force of mercy. Let us not limit its action; let us not sadden the Spirit, who constantly points out new paths to take in bringing to everyone the Gospel of salvation.

First, we are called to celebrate mercy. What great richness is present in the Church’s prayer when she invokes God as the Father of mercies! In the liturgy, mercy is not only repeatedly evoked, but is truly received and experienced. From the beginning to the end of the Eucharistic celebration, mercy constantly appears in the dialogue between the assembly at prayer and the heart of the Father, who rejoices to bestow his merciful love. After first pleading for forgiveness with the invocation “Lord have mercy”, we are immediately reassured: “May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and lead us to everlasting life”. With this confidence, the community gathers in the presence of the Lord, particularly on the holy day of the resurrection. Many of the “Collect” prayers are meant to remind us of the great gift of mercy. In Lent, for example, we pray: “O God, author of every mercy and of all goodness, who in fasting, prayer and almsgiving have shown us a remedy for sin, look graciously on this confession of our lowliness, that we, who are bowed down by our conscience, may always be lifted up by your mercy”.<sup>[4]</sup> We are then immersed in the great Eucharistic Prayer with the Preface that proclaims: “For you so loved the world that in your mercy you sent us the Redeemer, to live like us in all things but sin”.<sup>[5]</sup> The Fourth Eucharistic Prayer is a hymn to God’s mercy: “For you came in mercy to the aid of all, so that those who seek might find you”. “Have mercy on us all”<sup>[6]</sup> is the insistent plea made by the priest in the

Eucharistic Prayer to implore a share in eternal life. After the Our Father, the priest continues the prayer by invoking peace and liberation from sin by the “help of your mercy”. And before the sign of peace, exchanged as an expression of fraternity and mutual love in the light of forgiveness received, the priest prays: “Look not on our sins but on the faith of your Church”.<sup>[7]</sup> By these words, with humble trust we beseech the gift of unity and peace for Holy Mother Church. The celebration of divine mercy culminates in the Eucharistic Sacrifice, the memorial of Christ’s paschal mystery, the source of salvation for every human being, for history and for the whole world. In a word, each moment of the Eucharistic celebration refers to God’s mercy.

In the sacramental life, mercy is granted us in abundance. It is not without significance that the Church mentions mercy explicitly in the formulae of the two “sacraments of healing”, namely, the sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation and the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. In the first, the formula of absolution reads: “God, the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of his Son has reconciled the world to himself and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins; through the ministry of the Church may God give you pardon and peace”.<sup>[8]</sup> In the second, the formula of anointing reads:

“Through this holy anointing, may the Lord in his love and mercy help you with the grace of the Holy Spirit”.<sup>[9]</sup> In the Church’s prayer, then, references to mercy, far from being merely exhortative, are highly performative, which is to say that as we invoke mercy with faith, it is granted to us, and as we confess it to be vital and real, it truly transforms us. This is a fundamental element of our faith, and we must keep it constantly in mind. Even before the revelation of sin, there is the revelation of the love by which God created the world and mankind. Love is the first act whereby God makes himself known to us and comes to meet us. So let us open our hearts and trust in God’s love for us. His love always precedes us, accompanies us and remains with us, despite our sin.

6. In this context, hearing the word of God takes on particular significance. Each Sunday, God’s word is proclaimed in the Christian community so that the Lord’s Day may be illuminated by the paschal mystery.<sup>[10]</sup> In the Eucharistic celebration, we seem to witness a true dialogue between God and his people. In the biblical readings, we retrace the history of our salvation through the proclamation of God’s tireless work of mercy. The Lord continues to speak to us today as to friends; he dwells in our midst,<sup>[11]</sup> in order to accompany us and show us the path of life. His

word gives a voice to our inmost needs and worries, and offers a fruitful response, so that we can concretely experience his closeness to us. Hence the importance of the homily, in which “truth goes hand in hand with beauty and goodness”[12] so that the hearts of believers may thrill before the grandeur of mercy! I strongly encourage that great care be given to preparing the homily and to preaching in general. A priest’s preaching will be fruitful to the extent that he himself has experienced the merciful goodness of the Lord. Communicating the certainty that God loves us is not an exercise in rhetoric, but a condition for the credibility of one’s priesthood. The personal experience of mercy is the best way to make it a true message of consolation and conversion in the pastoral ministry. Both homiletics and catechesis need to be sustained by this pulsing heart of the Christian life.

7. The Bible is the great story of the marvels of God’s mercy. Every one of its pages is steeped in the love of the Father who from the moment of creation wished to impress the signs of his love on the universe. Through the words of the prophets and the wisdom writings, the Holy Spirit shaped the history of Israel as a recognition of God’s tenderness and closeness, despite the people’s infidelity. Jesus’ life and preaching decisively marked the history of the Christian community, which has viewed its mission in terms of Christ’s command to be a permanent instrument of his mercy and forgiveness (cf. Jn 20:23). Through Sacred Scripture, kept alive by the faith of the Church, the Lord continues to speak to his Bride, showing her the path she must take to enable the Gospel of salvation to reach everyone. I greatly desire that God’s word be increasingly celebrated, known and disseminated, so that the mystery of love streaming from this font of mercy may be ever better understood. As the Apostle tells us clearly: “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16).

It would be beneficial if every Christian community, on one Sunday of the liturgical year, could renew its efforts to make the Sacred Scriptures better known and more widely diffused. It would be a Sunday given over entirely to the word of God, so as to appreciate the inexhaustible riches contained in that constant dialogue between the Lord and his people. Creative initiatives can help make this an opportunity for the faithful to become living vessels for the transmission of God’s word. Initiatives of this sort would certainly include the practice of *lectio divina*, so that the prayerful reading of the sacred text will help support and strengthen the spiritual life. Such a reading, centred on themes relating to mercy,

will enable a personal experience of the great fruitfulness of the biblical text – read in the light of the Church’s spiritual tradition – and thus give rise to concrete gestures and works of charity.[13]

8. The celebration of mercy takes place in a very particular way in the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. Here we feel the embrace of the Father, who comes forth to meet us and grant us the grace of being once more his sons and daughters. We are sinners and we bear the burden of contradiction between what we wish to do and what we do in fact (cf. Rom 7:14-21). Yet grace always precedes us and takes on the face of the mercy that effects our reconciliation and pardon. God makes us understand his great love for us precisely when we recognize that we are sinners. Grace is stronger than sin: it overcomes every possible form of resistance, because love conquers all (cf. 1 Cor 13:7).

In the sacrament of Forgiveness God shows us the way to turn back to him and invites us to experience his closeness anew. This pardon can be obtained by beginning, first of all, to live in charity. The Apostle Peter tells us this when he writes that “love covers a multitude of sins” (1 Pet 4:8). Only God forgives sins, but he asks that we be ready to forgive others even as he forgives us: “Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us” (Mt 6:12). How sad it is when our hearts are closed and unable to forgive! Resentment, anger and revenge gain the upper hand, making our lives miserable and blocking a joyful commitment to mercy.

9. An experience of grace lived out by the Church with great effectiveness in the Jubilee Year has certainly been the service of the Missionaries of Mercy. Their pastoral activity sought to emphasize that God places no obstacles in the way of those who seek him with a contrite heart, because he goes out to meet everyone like a father. I have received many testimonies of joy from those who encountered the Lord once more in the sacrament of Confession. Let us not miss the opportunity to live our faith also as an experience of reconciliation. Today too, the Apostle urges us: “Be reconciled to God” (2 Cor 5:20), so that all who believe can discover the power of love which makes us “a new creation” (2 Cor 5:17).

I thank every Missionary of Mercy for this valuable service aimed at rendering effective the grace of forgiveness. This extraordinary ministry does not end with the closing of the Holy Door. I wish it to continue until further notice as a concrete sign that the grace of the Jubilee remains alive and effective the world



over. As a direct expression of my concern and closeness to the Missionaries of Mercy in this period, the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization will supervise them and find the most suitable forms for the exercise of this valuable ministry.

10. I invite priests once more to prepare carefully for the ministry of Confession, which is a true priestly mission. I thank all of you from the heart for your ministry, and I ask you to be welcoming to all, witnesses of fatherly tenderness whatever the gravity of the sin involved, attentive in helping penitents to reflect on the wrong they have done, clear in presenting moral principles, willing to walk patiently beside the faithful on their penitential journey, far-sighted in discerning individual cases and generous in dispensing God's forgiveness. Just as Jesus chose to remain silent in order to save the woman caught in adultery from the sentence of death, so every priest in the confessional should be open-hearted, since every penitent is a reminder that he himself is a sinner, but also a minister of mercy.

11. I would like us all to meditate upon the words of the Apostle, written towards the end of his life, when he confesses to Timothy that he was the greatest of sinners, "but for this reason I received mercy" (1 Tim 1:16). Paul's words, powerful as they are, make us reflect on our lives and see God's mercy at work in changing, converting and transforming our hearts. "I thank him who has given me strength for this, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful by appointing me to his service, though I formerly blasphemed and persecuted and insulted him; but I received mercy" (1 Tim 1:12-13).

Let us recall with renewed pastoral zeal another saying of the Apostle: "God has reconciled us to himself through Christ and has entrusted to us the message of reconciliation" (2 Cor 5:18). We were the first to be forgiven in view of this ministry, made witnesses at first hand of the universality of God's forgiveness. No law or precept can prevent God from once more embracing the son who returns to him, admitting that he has done wrong but intending to start his life anew. Remaining only at the level of the law is equivalent to thwarting faith and divine mercy. The law has an educational value (cf. Gal 3:24) with charity as its goal (cf. 1 Tim 1:5). Nonetheless, Christians are called to experience the newness of the Gospel, the "law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:2). Even in the most complex cases, where there is a temptation to apply a form of justice derived from rules alone, we must believe in the power flowing from divine grace.

We confessors have experienced many conversions that took place before our very eyes. We feel responsible, then, for actions and words that can touch the heart of penitents and enable them to discover the closeness and tenderness of the Father who forgives. Let us not lose such occasions by acting in a way that can contradict the experience of mercy that the penitent seeks. Rather, let us help light up the space of personal conscience with God's infinite love (cf. 1 Jn 3:20).

The Sacrament of Reconciliation must regain its central place in the Christian life. This requires priests capable of putting their lives at the service of the "ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor 5:18), in such a way that, while no sincerely repentant sinner is prevented from drawing near to the love of the Father who awaits his return, everyone is afforded the opportunity of experiencing the liberating power of forgiveness.

A favourable occasion for this could be the 24 Hours for the Lord, a celebration held in proximity to the Fourth Sunday of Lent. This initiative, already in place in many dioceses, has great pastoral value in encouraging a more fervent experience of the sacrament of Confession.

12. Given this need, lest any obstacle arise between the request for reconciliation and God's forgiveness, I henceforth grant to all priests, in virtue of their ministry, the faculty to absolve those who have committed the sin of procured abortion. The provision I had made in this regard, limited to the duration of the Extraordinary Holy Year,[14] is hereby extended, notwithstanding anything to the contrary. I wish to restate as firmly as I can that abortion is a grave sin, since it puts an end to an innocent life. In the same way, however, I can and must state that there is no sin that God's mercy cannot reach and wipe away when it finds a repentant heart seeking to be reconciled with the Father. May every priest, therefore, be a guide, support and comfort to penitents on this journey of special reconciliation.

For the Jubilee Year I had also granted that those faithful who, for various reasons, attend churches officiated by the priests of the Priestly Fraternity of Saint Pius X, can validly and licitly receive the sacramental absolution of their sins.[15] For the pastoral benefit of these faithful, and trusting in the good will of their priests to strive with God's help for the recovery of full communion in the Catholic Church, I have personally decided to extend this faculty beyond the Jubilee Year, until

further provisions are made, lest anyone ever be deprived of the sacramental sign of reconciliation through the Church's pardon.

13. Another face of mercy is consolation. "Comfort, comfort my people" (Is 40:1) is the heartfelt plea that the prophet continues to make today, so that a word of hope may come to all those who experience suffering and pain. Let us never allow ourselves to be robbed of the hope born of faith in the Risen Lord. True, we are often sorely tested, but we must never lose our certainty of the Lord's love for us. His mercy finds expression also in the closeness, affection and support that many of our brothers and sisters can offer us at times of sadness and affliction. The drying of tears is one way to break the vicious circle of solitude in which we often find ourselves trapped.

All of us need consolation because no one is spared suffering, pain and misunderstanding. How much pain can be caused by a spiteful remark born of envy, jealousy or anger! What great suffering is caused by the experience of betrayal, violence and abandonment! How much sorrow in the face of the death of a loved one! And yet God is never far from us at these moments of sadness and trouble. A reassuring word, an embrace that makes us feel understood, a caress that makes us experience love, a prayer that makes us stronger... all these things express God's closeness through the consolation offered by our brothers and sisters.

Sometimes too, silence can be helpful, especially when we cannot find words in response to the questions of those who suffer. A lack of words, however, can be made up for by the compassion of a person who stays at our side, who loves us and who holds out a hand. It is not true that silence is an act of surrender; on the contrary, it is a moment of strength and love. Silence too belongs to our language of consolation, because it becomes a concrete way of sharing in the suffering of a brother or sister.

14. At a time like our own, marked by many crises, including that of the family, it is important to offer a word of comfort and strength to our families. The gift of matrimony is a great calling to which spouses, by the grace of Christ, respond with a love that is generous, faithful and patient. The beauty of the family endures unchanged, despite so many problems and alternative proposals: "The joy of love experienced by families is also the joy of the Church".[16] The journey of life that leads a man and a woman to meet one other, to love one another and to promise

mutual fidelity before God, is often interrupted by suffering, betrayal and loneliness. Joy at the gift of children is accompanied by concern about their growth and education, and their prospects for happiness and fulfilment in life.

The grace of the sacrament of Matrimony not only strengthens the family to be a privileged place for practising mercy, but also commits the Christian community and all its pastoral activity to uphold the great positive value of the family. This Jubilee Year cannot overlook the complexity of the current realities of family life. The experience of mercy enables us to regard all human problems from the standpoint of God's love, which never tires of welcoming and accompanying.[17]

We have to remember each of us carries the richness and the burdens of our personal history; this is what makes us different from everyone else. Our life, with its joys and sorrows, is something unique and unrepeatable that takes place under the merciful gaze of God. This demands, especially of priests, a careful, profound and far-sighted spiritual discernment, so that everyone, none excluded, no matter the situation a person is living in, can feel accepted by God, participate actively in the life of the community and be part of that People of God which journeys tirelessly towards the fullness of his kingdom of justice, love, forgiveness and mercy.

15. Here too, we see the particular importance of the moment of death. The Church has always experienced this dramatic passage in the light of Christ's resurrection, which opened the way to the certainty of the life to come. We have a great challenge to face, especially in contemporary culture, which often tends to trivialize death to the point of treating it as an illusion or hiding it from sight. Yet death must be faced and prepared for as a painful and inescapable passage, yet one charged with immense meaning, for it is the ultimate act of love towards those we leave behind and towards God whom we go forth to meet. In all religions, the moment of death, like that of birth, is accompanied by a religious presence. As Christians, we celebrate the funeral liturgy as a hope-filled prayer for the soul of the deceased and for the consolation of those who suffer the loss of their loved one.

I am convinced that our faith-filled pastoral activity should lead to a direct experience of how the liturgical signs and our prayers are an expression of the Lord's mercy. It is the Lord himself who offers words of hope, since nothing and no one can ever separate us from his love (cf. Rom 8:35). The priest's sharing in

this moment is an important form of pastoral care, for it enables the closeness of the Christian community at a moment of helplessness, solitude, uncertainty and grief.

16. The Jubilee now ends and the Holy Door is closed. But the door of mercy of our heart continues to remain wide open. We have learned that God bends down to us (cf. Hos 11:4) so that we may imitate him in bending down to our brothers and sisters. The yearning of so many people to turn back to the house of the Father, who awaits their return, has also been awakened by heartfelt and generous testimonies to God's tenderness. The Holy Door that we have crossed in this Jubilee Year has set us on the path of charity, which we are called to travel daily with fidelity and joy. It is the road of mercy, on which we meet so many of our brothers and sisters who reach out for someone to take their hand and become a companion on the way.

The desire for closeness to Christ requires us to draw near to our brothers and sisters, for nothing is more pleasing to the Father than a true sign of mercy. By its very nature, mercy becomes visible and tangible in specific and powerful acts. Once mercy has been truly experienced, it is impossible to turn back. It grows constantly and it changes our lives. It is an authentic new creation: it brings about a new heart, capable of loving to the full, and it purifies our eyes to perceive hidden needs. How true are the words of the Church's prayer at the Easter Vigil, after the reading of the creation account: "O God, who wonderfully created human nature and still more wonderfully redeemed it".[18]

Mercy renews and redeems because it is the meeting of two hearts: the heart of God who comes to meet the human heart. The latter is warmed and healed by the former. Our hearts of stone become hearts of flesh (cf. Ezek 36:26) capable of love despite our sinfulness. I come to realize that I am truly a "new creation" (Gal 6:15): I am loved, therefore I exist; I am forgiven, therefore I am reborn; I have been shown mercy, therefore I have become a vessel of mercy.

17. During the Holy Year, especially on the "Fridays of Mercy", I was able to experience in a tangible way the goodness present in our world. Often it remains hidden, since it is daily expressed in discreet and quiet gestures. Even if rarely publicized, many concrete acts of goodness and tenderness are shown to the weak and the vulnerable, to those most lonely and abandoned. There are true champions of charity who show constant solidarity with the poor and the unhappy. Let us

thank the Lord for these precious gifts that invite us to discover the joy of drawing near to the woundedness of human weakness. I also think with gratitude of the many volunteers who daily devote their time and efforts to showing God's presence and closeness. Their service is a genuine work of mercy, one that helps many people draw closer to the Church.

18. Now is the time to unleash the creativity of mercy, to bring about new undertakings, the fruit of grace. The Church today needs to tell of those "many other signs" that Jesus worked, which "are not written" (Jn 20:30), so that they too may be an eloquent expression of the fruitfulness of the love of Christ and of the community that draws its life from him. Two thousand years have passed, yet works of mercy continue to make God's goodness visible.

In our own day, whole peoples suffer hunger and thirst, and we are haunted by pictures of children with nothing to eat. Throngs of people continue to migrate from one country to another in search of food, work, shelter and peace. Disease in its various forms is a constant cause of suffering that cries out for assistance, comfort and support. Prisons are often places where confinement is accompanied by serious hardships due to inhumane living conditions. Illiteracy remains widespread, preventing children from developing their potential and exposing them to new forms of slavery. The culture of extreme individualism, especially in the West, has led to a loss of a sense of solidarity with and responsibility for others. Today many people have no experience of God himself, and this represents the greatest poverty and the major obstacle to recognizing the inviolable dignity of human life.

To conclude, the corporal and spiritual works of mercy continue in our own day to be proof of mercy's immense positive influence as a social value. Mercy impels us to roll up our sleeves and set about restoring dignity to millions of people; they are our brothers and sisters who, with us, are called to build a "city which is reliable".[19]

19. Many concrete signs of mercy have been performed during this Holy Year. Communities, families and individuals have rediscovered the joy of sharing and the beauty of solidarity. But this is not enough. Our world continues to promote new forms of spiritual and material poverty that assault human dignity. For this reason, the Church must always be vigilant and ready to identify new works of mercy and to practise them with generosity and enthusiasm.

Let us make every effort, then, to devise specific and insightful ways of practising charity and the works of mercy. Mercy is inclusive and tends to spread like wildfire in a way that knows no limits. Hence we are called to give new expression to the traditional works of mercy. For mercy overflows, keeps moving forward, bears rich fruit. It is like the leaven that makes the dough rise (cf. Mt 13:33), or the mustard seed that grows into a tree (cf. Lk 13:19).

We need but think of one corporal work of mercy: “to clothe the naked” (cf. Mt 25:36, 38,43,44). This takes us back to the beginning, to the Garden of Eden, when Adam and Eve realized that they were naked and, hearing the Lord approaching, felt shame and hid themselves (Gen 3:7-8). We know that God punished them, yet he also “made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins, and clothed them” (Gen 3:21). He covered their shame and restored their dignity.

Let us think too of Jesus on Golgotha. The Son of God hangs naked on the cross; the soldiers took his tunic and cast lots for it (cf. Jn 19:23-24). He has nothing left. The cross is the extreme revelation of Jesus’ sharing the lot of those who have lost their dignity for lack of the necessities of life. Just as the Church is called to be the “tunic of Christ”[20] and to clothe her Lord once more, so She is committed to solidarity with the naked of the world, to help them recover the dignity of which they have been stripped. Jesus’ words, “I was naked and you clothed me” (Mt 25:36), oblige us not to turn our backs on the new forms of poverty and marginalization that prevent people from living a life of dignity.

Being unemployed or not receiving a sufficient salary; not being able to have a home or a land in which to live; experiencing discrimination on account of one’s faith, race or social status: these are just a few examples of many situations that attack the dignity of the person. In the face of such attacks, Christian mercy responds above all with vigilance and solidarity. How many situations exist today where we can restore dignity to individuals and make possible a truly humane life! Let us think only about the many children who suffer from forms of violence that rob them of the joy of life. I keep thinking of their sorrowful and bewildered faces. They are pleading for our help to be set free from the slavery of the contemporary world. These children are the young adults of tomorrow. How are we preparing them to live with dignity and responsibility? With what hope can they face their present or their future?

The social character of mercy demands that we not simply stand by and do nothing. It requires us to banish indifference and hypocrisy, lest our plans and projects remain a dead letter. May the Holy Spirit help us to contribute actively and selflessly to making justice and a dignified life not simply clichés but a concrete commitment of those who seek to bear witness to the presence of God's Kingdom.

20. We are called to promote a culture of mercy based on the rediscovery of encounter with others, a culture in which no one looks at another with indifference or turns away from the suffering of our brothers and sisters. The works of mercy are "handcrafted", in the sense that none of them is alike. Our hands can craft them in a thousand different ways, and even though the one God inspires them, and they are all fashioned from the same "material", mercy itself, each one takes on a different form.

The works of mercy affect a person's entire life. For this reason, we can set in motion a real cultural revolution, beginning with simple gestures capable of reaching body and spirit, people's very lives. This is a commitment that the Christian community should take up, in the knowledge that God's word constantly calls us to leave behind the temptation to hide behind indifference and individualism in order to lead a comfortable life free of problems. Jesus tells his disciples: "The poor you always have with you" (Jn 12:8). There is no alibi to justify not engaging with the poor when Jesus has identified himself with each of them.

The culture of mercy is shaped in assiduous prayer, in docility to the working of the Holy Spirit, in knowing the lives of the saints and in being close to the poor. It urges us not to overlook situations that call for our involvement. The temptation to theorize "about" mercy can be overcome to the extent that our daily life becomes one of participation and sharing. Nor should we ever forget what the Apostle Paul tells us about his meeting with Peter, James and John after his conversion. His words highlight an essential aspect of his own mission and of the Christian life as a whole: "Only they would have us remember the poor, which very thing I was eager to do" (Gal 2:10). We cannot forget the poor: this is an injunction as relevant today as ever, and one that compels by its evangelical warrant.



21. The Jubilee impresses upon us the words of the Apostle Peter: “Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy” (1 Pet 2:10). Let us not hold on jealously to what we have received, but share it with our suffering brothers and sisters, so that they can be sustained by the power of the Father’s mercy. May our communities reach out to all who live in their midst, so that God’s caress may reach everyone through the witness of believers.

This is the time of mercy. Each day of our journey is marked by God’s presence. He guides our steps with the power of the grace that the Spirit pours into our hearts to make them capable of loving. It is the time of mercy for each and all, since no one can think that he or she is cut off from God’s closeness and the power of his tender love. It is the time of mercy because those who are weak and vulnerable, distant and alone, ought to feel the presence of brothers and sisters who can help them in their need. It is the time of mercy because the poor should feel that they are regarded with respect and concern by others who have overcome indifference and discovered what is essential in life. It is the time of mercy because no sinner can ever tire of asking forgiveness and all can feel the welcoming embrace of the Father.

During the “Jubilee for Socially Excluded People”, as the Holy Doors of Mercy were being closed in all the cathedrals and shrines of the world, I had the idea that, as yet another tangible sign of this Extraordinary Holy Year, the entire Church might celebrate, on the Thirty-Third Sunday of Ordinary Time, the World Day of the Poor. This would be the worthiest way to prepare for the celebration of the Solemnity of our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe, who identified with the little ones and the poor and who will judge us on our works of mercy (cf. Mt 25:31-46). It would be a day to help communities and each of the baptized to reflect on how poverty is at the very heart of the Gospel and that, as long as Lazarus lies at the door of our homes (cf. Lk 16:19-21), there can be no justice or social peace. This Day will also represent a genuine form of new evangelization (cf. Mt 11:5) which can renew the face of the Church as She perseveres in her perennial activity of pastoral conversion and witness to mercy.

22. The Holy Mother of God always looks upon us with her eyes of mercy. She is the first to show us the way and to accompany us in our witness of love. As she is often shown in works of art, the Mother of Mercy gathers us all under the protection of her mantle. Let us trust in her maternal assistance and follow her perennial counsel to look to Jesus, the radiant face of God’s mercy.

Given in Rome, at Saint Peter's Basilica, on 20 November, the Solemnity of our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe, in the year 2016, the fourth of my Pontificate.

**FRANCISCUS**

