

Reflection given on the Year of Mercy, at a Holy Hour for young people, by Fr. Marius O'Reilly



Year of Mercy

As we know, our Holy Father, Pope Francis has called a special year of Mercy for the Church. He wants us to know how much we are loved – to give us hope in the midst of our own difficulties and sinfulness and failings.

But what exactly is mercy? I have often found it useful to think of the Latin of the word. You probably have heard it, 'Misericordia'. This is made up of two words: *miseri* and *cordia*. The first, 'Miseri' stands for our misery – we are weak creatures. We sin each day – we harbour resentment, jealousy, selfishness etc. The newspapers are awash with evidence of our misery, but all of us in our own way struggle. The second, 'Cordia' stands for heart. In the word Miseri-cordia therefore, our misery is met by the heart of God – this love embraces our weakness, and overcomes it. St. Faustina compares our sins in Confession to straw in the furnace. Even before the straw reaches the furnace it is consumed by its heat, so too our sins disappear in the furnace of God's love in the Sacrament of Confession.

God's nature is to love – everything He does is borne out of love therefore - St. Faustina said, "God's great attribute is His Mercy." I once heard a story about a woman whose son deserted the army of a very powerful dictator. The sentence handed down was death. She approached the dictator and pleaded with Him to show mercy. His response was, "he doesn't deserve mercy". The mother responded, "If he deserved it, then it wouldn't be mercy." This for me captures God's mercy – we don't deserve it. It's a free gift given to us. How we should embrace God's generosity.

In His mercy God created us. In His mercy He redeemed us through His Son. And in His mercy He allows us to participate in His divine Life both in this life, through the sacraments and also in Eternity. We haven't merited or deserved any of it. Isn't the

parable of the prodigal son a wonderful depiction of this? *Lk 15:11-32*. The Son has abused the gifts of the Father, his inheritance and only when he's hungry does he decide to return home. The Father doesn't react as you and I would, probably demanding an explanation and for the inheritance to be paid back, but instead He *runs* to Him and He celebrates. St. Luke mentions this little detail of the Father running – at that time in the Eastern culture it was considered unmanly for a man to run. God wants the world to know of His goodness – He wants all to return home.

So what can you and I do in this Year of Mercy? We can be dispensers of God's mercy. In other words giving when it's not merited. Is there someone we can love, who offends, or hurts me? Is there an elderly or sick person we can visit? Can I be a better listener, and put the needs of others before my own? The Church gives us guidelines: the Corporal and Spiritual works of mercy.

Corporal works of Mercy: To feed the hungry; To give drink to the thirsty; To clothe the naked; To harbour the harbourless; To visit the sick; To ransom the captive; To bury the dead.

Spiritual works of Mercy: To instruct the ignorant; To counsel the doubtful; To admonish sinners; To bear wrongs patiently; To forgive offences willingly; To comfort the afflicted; To pray for the living and the dead.

This Year of Mercy is above all, an opportunity to give people hope – to show light in the darkness.

May the Blessed Virgin Mary help us to know and tell others that “God is ever ready to understand and forgive”. That because of His *Miseri-cordia* there is always hope in the midst of darkness. Amen.

Rev. Fr. Marius O' Reilly, Chaplain to U.C.C.

