

MOTHER OF MERCY
(J.F.M.H. 3.8.2017)

Mary the most loving Mother of God was prepared by God to be a sinless Mother for His only Son Our Lord Jesus Christ, from the moment of her Conception. There never was a time when she had **any stain of sin**, even **Original Sin**. She was immaculate, whereas all other human beings, even the most holy, could only be made holy through '**sins forgiven**'. It is not difficult to see how her Immaculate Conception was necessary for her as Mother of God. In short, the first reason we can rightfully call Mary our "Mother of Mercy" is that by God's special, prevenient grace (Preceding in time), He created her soul to be the masterpiece of His Mercy in the world, and this special gift of grace, within her was the foundation of His whole work of mercy in the world through Christ. For centuries, Christians all over the world have cried out to the Blessed Virgin Mary, placing themselves under her tender care as "Mother of Mercy." We hear a clear echo of this cry in the life of St. Maria Faustina Kowalska, especially in that beautiful and tender passage in her diary where Mary encourages us all to approach her as a merciful mother. She is recorded (*Diary of St. Faustina*,) as saying "I am not only the Queen of Heaven, but also the **Mother of Mercy**, and your Mother". Everything about Mary was fashioned by Divine Mercy. and for the work of Divine Mercy. No other creature, therefore, so completely manifests God's Mercy as does Mary Immaculate.

There seems to have been no parable that so attracted the early Christians as the parable of the Good Shepherd. In April 2015 Pope Francis issued the Papal Bull "Misericordiae Vultus" proclaiming the Holy Jubilee Year of Mercy starting on the 8th December 2015, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception. *This liturgical feast day recalls God's action from the very beginning of the history of mankind. After the sin of Adam and Eve, God did not wish to leave humanity alone in the throes of evil. And so he turned his gaze to Mary, holy and immaculate in love (cf. Eph 1:4), choosing her to be the Mother of His Son, man's Redeemer. When faced with the gravity of sin, God responds with the fullness of mercy. Mercy will always be greater than any sin, and no one can place limits on the love of God who is ever ready to forgive.*

The act of mercy, as a divine attribute, has popular and lasting appeal. Shakespeare in the Merchant of Venice with great affect used it. It gives an idea of Mercy few Catholics would question. *"The quality of mercy is not strained; it droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven upon the place beneath. It is twice blest; it blesseth him that gives and him that takes: 'Tis mightiest in the mighty; it becomes the throned monarch better than his crown: his sceptre shows the force of temporal power, the attribute to awe and majesty, wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings; but mercy is above this sceptred sway; It is enthronèd in the hearts of kings, It is an attribute to God himself; and earthly power doth then show likest God's when mercy seasons justice. Therefore, Jew, though justice is thy plea, consider this, that, in the course of justice, none of us should see salvation: we do pray for mercy. And that same prayer doth teach us all to render the deeds of mercy. I have spoke thus much to mitigate the justice of thy plea; which if thou follow, this strict court of Venice must needs give sentence 'gainst the merchant there."*

In the Catholic Church The 'Holy Year of Mercy' ended on the 20 November 2016 (The Feast of Christ the King). With the closing of the Holy Door in St. Peter's in Rome. Pope Francis formally ended the Jubilee Year of Mercy, and said, **"while the year of special prayers and gatherings had ended, people should never close "the doors of reconciliation and pardon. What was important for this was to know "how to go beyond evil and differences."** We may well ask, with our wars, terror attacks, racial and social abuse etc. "How are we doing?" It is interesting to see how Jesus dealt with the objection of the Pharisees to the action of His disciples seen gathering and eating grain on the Sabbath, an act they considered as breaking the Law of Moses. It was a challenge of legalism versus mercy. Jesus compared the action of His disciples with that of King David and his companions in (1 Sam 21:1-6) and quoted the prophet Hosea, **"I desire mercy not sacrifice"**, because the virtue of mercy surpasses the demands of justice and especially legalistic justice. Christ came on Earth to save mankind. He gave His Church that same task. However, if she was to fulfil that task in its entirety, not only was it necessary for the Church to preach the Gospels and Baptize, she also needed His power to forgive sins committed after Baptism. St. John tells us how this was done. After His Resurrection, Christ passed this power to His apostles, *"Receive you the Holy Spirit, whose sins you shall forgive they are forgiven; and whose sins you shall retain they are retained."* (John XX. 22,23) They were given the power of retaining sins as well as forgiving them; they were to be judges. What they judged would be upheld in Heaven. That was a tremendous power. A power no Earthly King or legal system could ever give to the judges it appointed.

The State sets up courts of justice, the Church courts of mercy. The State in the name of justice punishes, and the Church in the name of Mercy forgives. The whole apparatus of the civil law is intended to

track down the criminal, to follow the traces of his work, and discover his identity. It gives him indeed, every possible means of escape in the sense that it affords him opportunity for proving his innocence or establishing such an explanation of his action as should procure his release. The one being judged by the State has an impartial judge. The jury, are presumed to be free by personal motives, so much so, that each member can be challenge by the defence and changed. It is no surprise then that the Holy Year of Mercy should begin on Feast of the Immaculate Conception, as Our Lady was part of the continuing preparations by God for her to become the Mother of His Son, to whom the attribute of Mercy belongs. In the case of Our Lady it is evident that she has a great understanding of all distress. We speak of her as the Queen of Martyrs, and the Mother of Sorrows, because we regard her as having touched the depth of all human anguish. The whole progress of her life was a progress in suffering, from the moment of the birth of her Son, through the early anxieties that the massacre of the Innocents entailed, the words of Simeon, the losing of the Child and His seemingly upbraiding words about doing His Father's business. The shadow of the Cross during all the 30 years of intimacy, the leave-taking, the known plotting of the Pharisees, the detailed pains of those last days, and the terrors of His agony and death and burial, have marked out her burdens as outside those of the rest of us. Is there any exaggeration in the way the Church applies to her the words the prophets spoke of her Son, that *there was "no other sorrow to be seen like unto hers?"*

The aim of the State is to punish the guilty and acquit the innocent. The courts of Justice punishes crimes with sentences lasting only during the earthly life of the perpetrator, while the judges in the courts of mercy (priests) are concerned not only with life of the body on earth but with the life of the immortal soul. Christ gave His Priests the power of retaining sins as well as forgiving them and the Church has now changed the name of the sacrament where that power is most used from the rather off-putting 'Confession' or 'Penance' to 'Reconciliation', a name that more easily describes it's purpose. Within the Communion of Saints all Saints are distinguished by love, The Mother of God reflects Her Son's love for all with a special intensity. Thus we call her by a number of titles that bring His type of unending and loving mercy to attention. She herself gave us the reason for doing so when she said, *"My soul does magnify the Lord" (Luke 1:46)*, she truly does just that, not to magnify herself, but to glorify her Son. She is fittingly called the **'Mother of God, Mother of Mercy, Our Lady of Perpetual Succour, and** such titles.

The Holy Year of Mercy ended on The Feast of Christ the King. However mercy itself does not end, it is still an attribute of God and the rules of the Commandments still apply. We must love our neighbour as ourselves. This reflects the life of Christ in all our thoughts and actions and reminds us of the guidance given by Pope Francis when he closed the Holy Door of St. Peter's, ***"What is important is to know "how to go beyond evil and differences.*** It was Pope St. John Paul II talking to some priests about the Sacrament of Reconciliation and their part in it that said, *"A minister of Christ, his sacrifice and his mercy: this is the priest as Jesus himself wished, linking him indissolubly to the two sacraments of the Eucharist and Reconciliation." ... "May the experience of divine mercy sanctify you and make you generous ministers of reconciliation. Do not be afraid to dedicate time and energy to the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The People of God need more than ever to rediscover it in its solemn liturgical dignity, as the ordinary way for the remission of grave sins and also in its beneficial 'humanizing' function.* When Christ was hanging on the cross, one of the two thieves crucified with Him spoke to Jesus. *"We are getting what we deserve for what we did...Remember me, Jesus, when you come into your kingdom"* (Luke 23:40-42) Jesus in His love for all repentant sinners who turn to Him, replied, *"Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."* (Luke 23:43) The 'good' thief by his confession became the first canonized saint. We don't know the name of the thief but he is normally called "Dismas" (a name which comes from the Greek word 'dysme' meaning 'dying'). Christ's love for us as repentant sinners who confess their sins to Him through a priest is no less than it was for Dismas.

"O my Jesus, forgive us our sins, save us from the fires of hell, and lead all souls to Heaven, especially those in most need of Your Mercy". (Our Lady at Fatima, 13th July 1917)