

Blessed are the merciful (Mt. 5:7)

Start with silence and reciting: *Heavenly King, Comforter, Spirit of Truth, Everywhere present and filling all things, Treasury of Blessings and Giver of Life, Come and dwell within us, Cleanse us of all stain, and save our souls, O Gracious One. Amen.*

Then read these pages, reflect on each part, and do the Individual Reflection at the end. Hopefully this will enrich your understanding of this Beatitude and strengthen your faith. Conclude with this prayer from the Psalms as in the Typical Psalms of our Green Pew Book:

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all my being bless his holy name. Blessed are you, O Lord.

Praise the Lord, O my soul. I will praise the lord all my life.

I will make music to my God while I live. Amen.

Word of God

Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy.

Shedding Light

Merciful. This beatitude presupposes the warning to “be merciful as your Father is merciful” (Luke 6:36) and the assurance that a merciful God will indeed have mercy on his people: “implored the Lord of heaven that mercy and safety may be granted to you” (Tob 6:18; cf. 1 Enoch 60:5 on God’s patience and mercy toward humans), for it is in God’s character to be merciful (LXX Exod 22:27, “I am merciful”; cf. Exod 34:6).

The Old Testament pictures God as merciful, and Israel is called to imitate God’s mercy. Mercy involves an inward identification with those in need and an outward action of kindness and generosity toward them.[1] The Hebrew *chesed* (merciful love, steadfast kindness) is best described in Psalm 103 [102]:8-10. The descriptions of *chesed* are in bold:

8 *The LORD is **merciful** and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.*

9 *He **will not always chide,**
nor will he keep his anger forever.*

10 *He **does not deal with us according to our sins,**
nor repay us according to our iniquities.*

Read this Psalm portion together with Lk 15:11-32 (the parable of the Merciful Father and two sons). See also Mt 6:12, 14-15; 18:21-35; 25:31-40. Those who are merciful may then expect to “receive mercy.”

[1] C. Mitch & E. Sri, *Matthew*, p. 90

The source of this way of life (being merciful) is found in Jesus' sacrifice for us:

6 For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. **7** For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— **8** but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Rom 5:6-8)

To forgive, however, as an act has nothing to do with emotions. Often, we mix the two realities. To forgive means “not to pay back the wrong doing”, “not to take revenge”. Forgiveness is an act of human will. You gossip about me, I will not do it to you! Nevertheless, the wound and the bitterness of the offense remains in our hearts. Therefore, it is crucial to cure the wound by coming to Jesus and pouring out our hearts to him, to complain to him, if you wish. Let us not confound the two!!! The Father does not deal with us according to our sins, nor does he repay us according to our iniquities (Ps 103 [102]: 10). Jesus gives a very clear answer to Peter’s question about forgiving:

21 Then Peter came up and said to him, Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times? **22** Jesus said to him, I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven. **23** Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. **24** When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. **25** And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. **26** So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything. **27** And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. **28** But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, Pay what you owe. **29** So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, Have patience with me, and I will pay you. **30** He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. **31** When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. **32** Then his master summoned him and said to him, You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. **33** And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you? **34** And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. **35** So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart. (Mt 18:21-35)

Pope Francis (General Audience – Catechesis on the Beatitudes, March 18, 2020):

There is a peculiar aspect to this beatitude. It is the only one in which the cause and the fruit of happiness coincide: mercy. Those who show mercy will find mercy, they will be "shown mercy".

This theme of reciprocity of forgiveness is not found only in this Beatitude, but is recurrent throughout the Gospel. How could it be otherwise? Mercy is the very heart of God! Jesus says: "Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive and you will be forgiven" (Lk 6:37). It is always the same reciprocity. And the Letter of James states that "mercy triumphs over judgment" (Jam 2:13).

But it is above all in the "Lord's Prayer" that we pray: "forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Mt 6:12); and this question is taken up again at the end: "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses (Mt 6:14-15; cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2838).

There are two things that cannot be separated: forgiveness granted and forgiveness received. However, many people struggle; they cannot forgive. Often the harm received is so great that being able to forgive feels like climbing a very high mountain: an enormous effort; and one thinks: it cannot be done, this cannot be done. This fact of the reciprocity of mercy shows that we have to overturn the perspective. We cannot do this alone. We need God's grace, we must ask for it. Indeed if the fifth Beatitude promises mercy, and in the "Lord's Prayer" we ask for the forgiveness of debts, it means that we are essentially debtors and we need to find mercy!

We are all debtors. All of us. To God who is so generous and to our brothers and sisters. Everyone knows that he/she is not the father or mother that he or she should be, the bride or groom, the brother or sister. We are all "in deficit" in life. And we need mercy. We know that we too have done wrong. There is always something lacking in the good that we should have done.

However, our very poverty becomes our strength to forgive! We are debtors and if, as we heard at the start, we shall be measured with the same measure with which we measure others (cf. Lk 6:38), then it would suit us to widen our measure and to forgive debts; to forgive. Each person should remember that they need to forgive, they are in need of forgiveness and they need patience. This is the secret to mercy: by forgiving one is forgiven. Thus God precedes us and he forgives us first (cf. Rom 5:8). In receiving his forgiveness, we too are capable of forgiving. One's own misery and lack of justice therefore, become opportunities to open oneself up to the Kingdom of Heaven, to a greater measure, the measure of God who is mercy.

Where does our mercy come from? Jesus told us: "Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful" (Lk 6:36). The more one welcomes the Father's love, the more we can love (cf. CCC 2842). Mercy is not a dimension among others but rather the centre of Christian life. There is no Christianity without mercy

[Cf. Saint John Paul II, *Encyclical Dives in Misericordia* (30 November 1980); *Misericordiae Vultus Bull* (11 April 2015); *Apostolic Letter Misericordia et misera* (20 November 2016)]. If all our Christianity does not lead us to mercy, then we have taken the wrong path because mercy is the only true destination of all spiritual journeys. It is one of the most beautiful fruits of mercy (cf. CCC 1829).

I remember that this theme was chosen for the first Angelus that I had to recite as Pope: mercy. And this has remained very much impressed on me, as a message that I would always have to offer as Pope, a message for everyday: mercy. I remember that on that day I even had an attitude that was somewhat "brazen", as if I were advertising a book about mercy that had just been published by Cardinal Kasper. And on that day I felt very strongly that this is the message that I must offer as Bishop of Rome: mercy, mercy, please, forgiveness.

God's mercy is our liberation and our happiness. We live of mercy and we cannot afford to be without mercy. It is the air that we breathe. We are too poor to set any conditions. We need to forgive because we need to be forgiven.

Individual Reflection

- Am I merciful? Do I understand the difference between mercy and emotional over-indulging? ('Oooh, nothing happened, it is okay...when in fact something wrong was done)
- Do I ask for forgiveness, admitting mistakes and wrong doings or do I always have excuses?
- Do I admit my failures and apologize?
- Do I make daily an examination of conscience?
- Am I aware of what God has forgiven me? Aware of his mercy? Am I grateful for his mercy?
- Pray Ps 103 [102] and give concrete, specific content to the words **benefits, iniquity, redeems your life from the pit, sins, and transgressions!** Pray the Psalm again, however, with the content you filled in.
- Am I always critical toward my parish, priest, bishop, and the Eparchy?
- Do I recall the good when I am critical?
- When critical and pointing out the mistakes and things that should be done, am I the first to volunteer for my proposal (to realize it)?
- Am I actively involved in making the parish life, eparchial and community life better?
- When was the last time I came up with an initiative to improve things in my parish/eparchy offering my time, energy, and skills without criticizing? What was it concretely?
- Forgiving involves my will – I will not repay you the wrong you did to me – however, wounds, bitterness, and frustration remain. What do I do with it?
- Do I come to the Lord asking him to heal me? Do I spend time for this reason before the Lord in silence (in church or at home)?