

## Missionary Commentary

Fourth Sunday of Lent, Year C  
March 30, 2025

## Sunday Readings

Joshua 5:9a, 10-12  
Psalm 34:2-7  
2 Corinthians 5:17-21  
Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

[USCCB Link to the Readings](#)

## Mercy: The Beating Heart of the Gospel

Pope Francis is truly a “pope of mercy,” focusing the Church’s attention on this theme, particularly in his 2014 book, *The Church of Mercy*. In addition, his document, *Misericordiae Vultus* (MV) [The Face of Mercy] (April 11, 2015), proclaimed an entire *year of mercy*, which began on December 8, 2015 [50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the close of Vatican II]. Francis says: “We need constantly to contemplate the mystery of mercy. It is a wellspring of joy, serenity, and peace.... Mercy [is] the bridge that connects God and man” (MV 2). We can catch a glimpse of the pope’s profound vision of mercy through *five key ideas*.

**God, Father of Mercy.** Scripture clearly affirms that God is “the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation” (2 Corinthians 1:3). Our God is “rich in mercy” (Ephesians 2:4). Today’s Gospel narrates one of Jesus’ best-known parables, that of the “merciful father” in Luke 15:11-32. The magnanimous father shows his overflowing love, mercy and compassion to *both* of his sons.

**Jesus, the Face of the Father’s Mercy.** In Jesus of Nazareth, mercy has become living and visible. Jesus’ entire life and “his person is nothing but love, a love given gratuitously.... The signs he works, especially in the face of sinners, the poor, the marginalized, the sick, and the suffering, are all meant to teach mercy” (MV 8).

**Church, Community of Mercy.** “Mercy is the very foundation of the Church’s life. All of her pastoral activity should be caught up in the tenderness she makes present to believers” (MV 10). “The Church is commissioned to announce the mercy of God, the beating heart of the Gospel.... Wherever there are Christians, everyone should find an oasis of mercy” (MV 12).

**Mary, Mother of Mercy.** “My thoughts now turn to the Mother of Mercy.... No one has penetrated the profound mystery of the incarnation like Mary. Her entire life was patterned after the presence of mercy made flesh.... She treasured divine mercy in her heart” (MV 24).

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**Christians and the Practice of Mercy.** Here are some guidelines for our living-in-mercy: (1) Manifesting God's mercy is a duty for every Christian; it is not optional. (2) Mercy addresses various types of suffering; Christians are called to a renewed practice of the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. (3) Mercy is challenging; its demands are often inconvenient and unpredictable. (4) Practicing mercy must spring from God's love in our hearts (Romans 5:5); it is not only giving things, but giving ourselves. (5) Pray that the 2025 Jubilee Year of Hope may also prove to be a year full of grace and mercy!

## **Notes on the Sunday Readings**

**First Reading — Joshua 5:9-12** Today's reading from the Book of Joshua narrates how the manna ceased after the Israelites came into the Promised Land. Then, in their new land the people started celebrating the Passover feast. Both the phenomenon of manna and the feast of the Passover have obvious significance for believers in Christ.

**Responsorial Psalm — Psalm 34:3-7** This psalm reflects the prayer of the Israelites at the Passover meal. In all of life, especially in the Eucharist, Christians are invited to "taste and see the goodness of the Lord."

**Second Reading — 2 Corinthians 5:17-21** Here in his second letter to the Corinthians Paul gives us his teaching on a major theme: reconciliation. All are summoned to be reconciled with God and with one another. Paul issues an urgent plea: "We implore you, in Christ's name: be reconciled to God!"

**Gospel — Luke 15:1-3, 11-32** In today's Gospel (which we also heard this year on Saturday of the Second Week of Lent) Saint Luke presents one of Jesus' most famous parables; it is the story of the Prodigal Son. However, it could also be given the title of the Merciful Father. Notice that the father caught sight of his returning son "while he was still a long way off" and "was filled with compassion." What a wonderful portrayal of our God, who is personally filled with mercy and compassion for each one of us!

*Notes and Commentary by Maryknoller James H. Kroeger, who recently published [Walking with Pope Francis: The Official Documents in Everyday Language](#) (Orbis Books – 2023) and [Exploring Vatican II Treasures: Actors, Events, Insights](#), commemorating the sixtieth anniversary of the close of Vatican II [1965-2025] (Faith Alive Books – 2024).*

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