

Overflowing Mercy

*A Missionary Commentary on the
Sunday Readings*

Sunday Readings

Isaiah 5:1-7

Psalms 80:9+12, 13-14, 15-16, 19-20

Philippians 4:6-9

Matthew 21:33-43

[USCCB link to the Sunday Readings](#)

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*, beginning on December 8, 2015 [50th 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 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 Cor 1:3). Our God is “rich in mercy” (Eph 2:4). One of Jesus’ best-known parables is that of the “merciful father”: Lk 15:11-32. The magnanimous father shows his overflowing 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 is 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. 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 (Rm 5:5); it is not only giving things, but giving ourselves.
- (5) Pray that this year of reading Matthew's Gospel, a "Book of Mercy," may truly be a year of grace!

Notes on the Sunday Readings

First Reading

Isaiah, the 8th century BC prophet, sings of God as a friend who lavished care on his vineyard, but only got sour grapes from it. The vineyard did not yield genuine fruit, deeds of mercy and compassion.

Psalm 80

This psalm implores God's mercy on his people, the vine that he had personally planted.

Second Reading

Today we continue our reading from Philippians—Paul's personal letter, an "epistle of joy." A deep friendship had developed between Paul and the Philippian Church. Paul offers tender encouragement to them to live their lives filled with merciful works.

Gospel

This year we are continuing to read and study the Gospel of Matthew, truly a "book of mercy." Matthew saw his own vocation to follow Jesus as a choice flowing from Jesus' overflowing mercy (cf. Mt 9:9). God's vineyard will be given to those who yield a rich harvest of merciful deeds.

*Notes and Commentary by Maryknoller James Kroeger,
who recently published [Walking with Pope Francis \(Orbis Books\)](#)*

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