



## Blessed Are the Merciful

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**A**s we are in the Year of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, proclaimed by our Pope Francis, it is proper and fitting to reflect on the theme “Blessed are the Merciful.”

This theme brings to my mind a touching incident which took place some time between 1979 and 1982. During this period, the Chief of the Naval Staff in India was a Catholic, Admiral Ronald Pereira, and the Prime Minister of our country was Mrs. Indira Gandhi, a powerful woman feared by everyone. Adm. Pereira had been called for a meeting with the Prime Minister. His secretary, Capt. Sen, saw to every detail of the Admiral's schedule, so that they would reach the PM's office in time. As their car was speeding through the streets of the Capital, the Admiral noticed a young man staggering on the footpath, with an elderly person on his back. He ordered the driver to stop, got out of the car and asked the youth: “where are you going with this elderly man on your back?” The youngster replied: “I am carrying my father to the hospital. He is seriously ill and I cannot afford a taxi. We are poor.” Adm. Pereira told his secretary: “we'll take them to the hospital.” Capt. Sen protested, saying: “if you take them to the hospital, you will be late for the appointment with the PM and she will be angry.” The Admiral did not heed his protesting and helped both the father and the son into his car. When they reached the hospital, the Admiral

helped the young man to carry his old and sick father along. The hospital staff and authorities looked dazed when they saw this dashing Admiral in his medal-studded blazing uniform bringing this haggard-looking old man and were wondering who he could possibly be. Once he had kept the old man on the bed, he told the doctors and nurses: “he is my relative; take good care of him. I will come again to inquire about his health.” He then went for his appointment and, expectedly, he was late for about 15 minutes. The Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, did not say a word. Probably she came to know, from her intelligence officials, that the Admiral had gone out of his way to help a poor old sick person on his way to her office. Some time later, Capt. Sen, recalling what his Admiral had done for that poor, old person, wrote: “I learnt on that day an unforgettable lesson in Christian compassion and mercy.”

In the Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, Pope Francis states, right at the start, that “Jesus Christ is the face of the Father’s Mercy.”

In the book of Exodus, we hear how God reveals his name to Moses as “a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for a thousand generations, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin” (Ex 34: 6-7a). Having shown his mercy in many ways and through various prophets, God finally revealed his compassion to us perfectly through His Son Jesus. Pope Francis in *Misericordiae Vultus* (MV) says: “Jesus of Nazareth, by his words, his actions and his entire person reveals the mercy of God” (MV 1). “Everything in Jesus speaks of mercy. Nothing in him is devoid of compassion” (MV 8). In the Beatitudes, Jesus says: “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.”

In the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk.10: 25-37), Jesus imparts to us a rich and powerful message on mercy. As we heard, a lawyer approaches Jesus and confronts him with a question: “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”

Jesus asks him: “What is written in the Law?” He answers: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and love your neighbour as yourself.” And Jesus told him: “You have answered right; do this and you will live.”

We see that Jesus and the lawyer agree that both – the love of God and of the neighbour – are necessary. However, in order to justify himself, the lawyer further asks Jesus: “And who is my neighbour?” In fact, at the time of Jesus, various religious groups in Palestine used to debate these two central questions about the law of Moses: (i) which is the most important commandment of the law and (ii) who is the neighbour whom one must love. Is it my brother, my relative, my friend, any stranger or even my enemy? At that point, Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan, which we have just heard.

There are three individuals who pass that side and see the victim of the robbers, who had left him terribly wounded and half dead:

A Priest was going down that road; when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. According to the law of Moses, if he had to touch a dead person, he would be rendered impure, unable to offer service in the temple. The first concern of the priest was cultic purity.

The Levite who saw him, did the same; he was afraid the fallen man might be pretending to be injured and that it could all be a plot; “his companions may attack me and I may become their victim,” he said to himself. “I had better avoid unnecessary trouble!” His major concern was his personal safety.

Finally, a Samaritan, who was journeying, came to where the wounded man was, and when he saw him, he had compassion, just as the Father of the Prodigal Son had compassion when he saw his son coming back to him: a compassion that wells up from the depth of one’s being. The Samaritan showed his compassion concretely through his deeds: he went close to the wounded man, bound up his wounds, poured oil and wine on

them, put him on his own beast, brought him to an inn and took care of him; the next day, he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper saying: “Take care of him and, when I return, I will repay you any extra expenses you may have.” His one concern was true charity.

That Samaritan put all that he had -- his time, his energy, his talents, his money, his animal, his oil and wine -- at the service of an unknown stranger. And Jesus asks the lawyer: “Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a ‘neighbour’ to the man who fell among the robbers?” He replied: “The one who showed mercy to him.” And Jesus said: “Go and do likewise.” Go and be merciful like him and you will be truly blessed.

At the beginning of the parable, the “neighbour” appeared to be the victim of the robbers. But there is a shift of focus. The final question is about “who proved to be a neighbour” to the wounded man. While others failed, it is the travelling Samaritan who shows himself to be the true “neighbour.” It is, therefore, we who are called to be neighbours to others.

What does this parable teach us? Who is the Good Samaritan?

First and foremost, Jesus, the Son of God, makes himself a Good Samaritan to the entire humanity and to each one of us. We are injured and wounded in so many ways: by our sin, by our selfishness, our fears, our weaknesses, failings and infidelities. We also see that, during his life and ministry, Jesus made himself a Good Samaritan to so many persons, like Zacchaeus, the Samaritan woman, the tax-collectors, the lepers, the sick, the poor, the blind, the deaf, the sinners, etc.

Every baptized disciple of Jesus is called to be a Good Samaritan (good neighbour) to others, especially to the needy, the weak, the poor, the fallen, those who offend us and are hostile to us. The great challenge before us, therefore, is to make ourselves “a neighbour” to others, to show mercy and to put all our gifts at their service.

In a special way, we priests, consecrated men and women and seminarians are called to be Good Samaritans in our life, our attitudes, our ministry, by being witnesses of the mercy of Jesus. In fact, Pope Francis, while commissioning the Missionaries of Mercy, exhorted them

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to render present in their life, and particularly in their confessional ministry, the motherhood of the Church. He said: “We are called to be the living expressions of the Church that, as Mother, receives anyone who approaches her, knowing that, through her, he is inserted in Christ. As we enter the confessional, we should always remember that it is Christ who welcomes, it is Christ who listens, it is Christ who forgives, it is Christ who gives peace. We are his ministers and we ourselves are always in need of being forgiven by him.”

Let us pray that during this Academic/Formation Year we may all learn to grow in Jesus’ school of mercy and thus prepare ourselves to become shepherds after the mind and heart of Jesus, the compassionate Shepherd of us all. Amen.

Adapted from the Homily at the Inaugural Mass of the new Academic Year at the Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune (06.06.2016). 