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MSMHC Missionary Journal
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Vol. 15 No. 1

Jan - Jun 2016



The Year of Mercy:
An invitation to become true Apostles of Mercy

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MSMHC Missionary Journal



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Editorial

Pope Francis in one of his reflections about the jubilee of mercy said "Mercy *is the name of our God, without mercy we are lost, hearing the word mercy changes everything, God's mercy lovingly heals the wounds of sin and mercy is the Lord's powerful message…"* This is an invitation to each one of us to accept and believe the abundant mercy of God in our personal life and to make this a reality in the lives of others. Recognizing the mercy of God in our personal life be it in the form of being forgiven, understood, cared, spared, protected, defended, helped and looked after is a must because that enables us to understand the depth of God's mercy and makes us to realize our nothingness, unworthiness (Lk7:6). The experience of God's mercy in our life should give us joy and happiness, and make us hopeful, joyful and purposeful like the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:4-28) who after meeting the Lord Jesus went back to the town and proclaimed her meeting with the Messiah who knew everything about her and changed her life. An experience of inner healing leads to actions.

Pope Francis constantly invites us to become ministers of mercy, to make this mercy a concrete reality in the lives of people. In his address to the World Food Programme (WFP) organizers he said to recognize those who suffer from poverty and hunger as more than a statistic. He also said "*The fact that today, well into the 21st century, so many people suffer from this food shortage is due to a selfish and wrong distribution of resources, to the 'merchandizing' of food. ... The faces of the starving remind us that we have foiled its purposes. We have turned a gift with a universal destination into a privilege enjoyed by a select few. We have made the fruits of the earth - a gift to humanity - commodities for a few, thus engendering exclusion."* In this context, Cardinal Peter K.A. Turks, President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace said, "*Hunger is too real in this world. ... As long as hunger is not overcome, humanity will not live in peace. We will not have peace so long as some banquet daily while others are starving at their doorstep or on the other side of the planet. For ours is one common home and we are eating at one common table".* Our call is to put our minds, hearts and strength together to address this human issue in our homes, working places and society through our solidarity, compassion, relationships and involvement. Today is a given opportunity for all of us to practice mercy and compassion to our brothers and sisters.

The articles in the journals are the reflections on different dimensions of "God's mercy on humanity and creation that God wants to save and not lose them. Our encounters with the Eucharistic Lord should lead us to actions making mercy a reality thus reducing hunger and poverty in our planet.

Sr. Christine Mynsong
General Councilor for Evangelization

Superior General's Message



The wheel of time kept rolling swiftly and here we are at the middle of the Year of Mercy with half the year added to the history and half remaining still as an unfolded mystery ahead of us. Called to be icons of God's mercy, at the very beginning of the year of mercy, we were invited to comfort the people of God: "Comfort, comfort my people" says your God, "Speak tenderly to Jerusalem" (Is 40: 1-2). How have we fared in our mission of brining comfort and solace to the people of God beginning with those we daily rub shoulders with in our communities during the bygone months of this jubilee year of mercy? Often it is easy to be merciful in the 'abstract', to be merciful to a group of imaginary beings or to those living in distant lands, but to be merciful or forgiving towards concrete beings living next to us, who gets on to our nerves every now and then, or who might have hurt us deeply, is absolutely not easy. But it is definitely possible to the extend we ourselves become recipients or beneficiaries of God's infinite mercy and love. Have we not perhaps experienced God's comforting, healing and forgiving love? Or have we made light of such experiences or resisted them by holding on to the self-defeating mechanisms we consciously or unconsciously employ? The often found self-defeating mechanisms in the structure of human persons include: excessive inability to forgive oneself, a tendency to perpetuate a victim mentality, an on-going clinging to a paralysing sense of guilt, an irresistible craze for revenge, vengeance or retaliation towards the offender, an inability to say goodbye to the past hurts, a tendency to keep record of wrongs done and wrongs received, and a terrible amnesia of the positive experiences of one's life and the goodness and graciousness experienced from God and others.

Venerable Stephen Ferrando stands out as an icon of God's mercy because he was a man totally open to God's mercy, who allowed himself to be comforted by his personal relationship with the Lord and master, especially by the Eucharistic Lord. The fact that he spend long hours of silent prayer before the Eucharistic Lord and sustained a living devotion to the crucified Lord is a clear evidence of how he always nurtured and preserved a deep and personal experience of God's infinite mercy. His deep personal encounter with the merciful God, enabled him to move out as a true witness of His love in word and deed, to the poor and needy, the sick and the suffering, the vulnerable and the neglected, the wrong doer and offender.

As we have reached halfway through this extraordinary year of mercy, let us not proceed blindly, merely fulfilling our obligations and entertaining mechanical devotional practices, but let us have the courage to stop and introspect our 'being and our doing' so that we can make new and corrective decisions which will then lead us to transformed actions and consequently transformed lives.

Sr. Philomena Mathew
Superior General

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An Oasis of Mercy in the Desert of Life: The Call of the Jubilee Year of Mercy

Francis Thadathil MSFS

Throughout the history of the Church, Jubilees have come to be celebrated at the inspiration of various Popes. The extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy, decreed by Pope Francis through the Bull of Indiction, *Misericordiae Vultus*, was begun with the ritual opening of the Holy Door of Mercy in the Basilica of St Peter in Rome on Dec 8, 2015. With the challenging theme, "be merciful like the Father" the Holy Father propounds a daringly new conduit for the Church to traverse in the contemporary world. In 25 paragraphs of *Misericordiae Vultus,* Pope Francis has succeeded to unfold the contour of this new pathway with the absolute conviction that the "Church is commissioned to announce the mercy of God" .

The Jubilee Year beckons everyone, including the religious and priests to live out heroically the true meaning of the extraordinary Jubilee of mercy. We have no dearth of resources, be it spiritual or material. We lack no opportunities for living this year heroically. Yet the question is: will I take the courage to become the face of God's mercy for people? Or will I reduce this Jubilee to a mere conducting of a few programs and activities? Perhaps, we could take a peep into the celebration of the Year of faith and the Year of Consecrated life that preceded the Jubilee Year of Mercy. In our communities and parishes we have had many programs and activities- all meticulously planned and conducted. However, have those celebrations touched our hearts? Have they helped to change our lives in any way? Or did we miss out totally the heart of those special years- inner transformation at personal and communal levels? Becoming a new person, a better human being, a fervent religious, a zealous collaborator in ministry; and an ardent member of the religious community- to these paths we were expected to have made new journeys. But have we really? Each of us needs to answer it in all honesty.

The Jubilee Year of Mercy invites us to become "living sign[s] of the Father's love in the world." Random acts of charity, carried out at our convenience wouldn't make us signs of God's love in the world. Acts of love which has a distinct quality and originating from within the authentic self of a person alone can give the sign value. Don't we look for external resources for augmenting the quality of our life and ministry? However, the resources are within us. We need to rely on those inner resources to become truly authentic and resourceful in our life and ministry. Let us examine the inner resources that remain mostly under-utilized by all of us.

1. Discovery of one's own true identity

The Gospel stories portray Jesus in many shades- teacher, master, story teller, healer, social activist, spiritual leader, and even as a revolutionary. St. Mark would even summarize: "he has done all things well" (7:37). Yet none of these perceptions could have captured the real Jesus. For, Jesus did not cling to any of those titles, as they were prejudiced human perceptions. On the contrary, Jesus

detained the divine perception: the beloved son of the Father. Jesus makes unremitting effort to reveal this divine perception –his true identity- to everyone. Gospels show that everything Jesus said or done was directed and guided by the identity he enjoyed, and fully convinced of. Even at the most intense moments of passion, Jesus lives by the singular conviction of being the beloved of the Father- sent by the Father, and sent to fulfill Father's plan- revealing God's mercy to humanity.

We are created in the image of God. So, it is in our nature to be the image of God. That is why Jesus can say to us: "Be compassionate as your Father is compassionate" (Lk 6:36). When Jesus looks at us he believes that you and I are in reality capable of being like God. Jesus has a fantastically high opinion of each of us! He believes that as we live with compassion in our hearts, we become divine. The Year of Mercy is an invitation to all of us, particularly the religious and priests, to become vessels of compassion. One cannot be a 'vessel of mercy' without the strong conviction of one's own identity. In fact, no human person can live meaningfully without the certainty of one's own identity. For many of us, our identity is linked to power and authority, money and status, job and home, or the position enjoyed in the society. How often in our communities we measure the value of persons because of the offices or positions held by them? What about the majority who do not hold any high position? Where would their identity come from? So, what really is the source of our identity? The answer is clear to us- Child of God, precious and beloved to God. The crux of all major issues both at the personal and community levels stems from a crisis of identity- a lack of clear conviction of the primary identity as child of God.

Luke is the only evangelist who gives us a glimpse of Jesus emerging from childhood into his first awareness of adult identity. The certainty of awareness is undoubtedly manifested to Mary and Joseph who, after much searching, finally found him at the temple. St Luke presents this scene and we hear Jesus' cryptic lines: "Why are you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"(Lk 2:49) Joseph and Mary- the human parents of Jesus- can only treasure this event in their hearts! Jesus was not *lost;* he was *finding himself* in the temple. And for the next 18 years or so, Jesus would prepare well for answering the call he *found* in the temple. Throughout the public ministry, Jesus sets on a relentless path to reveal his identity to people. Particularly, in John's Gospel we would recognize Jesus' unvarying endeavor to make known his identity. And one can easily discover the secret of Jesus' life and ministry and the source of his inner strength- the awareness of his close communion with the Father. The courage for his journey to Calvary- the extreme act of mercy to humanity- originates precisely from the conviction of his identity as beloved son of the Father.

As children, we have read the story of an eaglet among chicks. The eaglet went on doing things as chicks did; and happily kept on living the ways of chicks until the day when eaglet is helped to discover its true identity. And the recognition sets the eaglet on an entirely new journey in life. Genuine conversion of heart starts from the discovery and acceptance of our true identity. One cannot become truly a vessel of mercy without the discovery of one's identity as a child of God and a firm belief in that identity. If the church is to administer generously the "medicine of mercy" and help to reach "the balm of mercy to everyone" in the contemporary world, it must have ministers who not only know their identity well, but also believe and live by that identity.

2. Growth in Self knowledge

Schools of philosophy and spirituality would consistently underscore self knowledge as a requisite for excellence in life. In *Interior Castle*, St Theresa of Avila writes: "No matter how exalted the soul may be, nothing is more necessary than self knowledge… without it everything goes wrong… Knowing ourselves is something so important that I wouldn't want any relaxation in this regard, however high you may have climbed the heavens... Let's strive to make more progress in self knowledge…" The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* proposes that "Whoever wants to remain faithful to his baptismal promises and resist temptations will want to adopt the means for doing so: Self knowledge…" In Catholic spirituality, knowledge is a gift from the Holy Spirit. Certainly this gift is more than a mere intellectual prowess. It is evident from our experience that Degrees do not necessarily stand as proofs to one's knowledge. Not all Degree holders in our communities demonstrate even the basic attitude or disposition to recognize the need of the other or the willingness to reach out to others. Knowledge is the ability and disposition that gives the individual to perceive his right relation to the world and to realities that are beyond the visible world; and direct one's life and actions accordingly.

When our self perception is congruent with the way others experience us we can say that we have certain degree of accurate self knowledge. We live by a clear concept of our potential as well as limitations. Without this capacity for self awareness, we will not be conscious of how we come across to others. In his *Confessions,* St Augustine highlights how prone human nature is to bypass self awareness: " Men go abroad to admire the heights and mountains, the mighty billows of the seas, the course of rivers, the vast extent of the ocean, the circular motion of stars, and yet pass *themselves* by." When one lacks self-knowledge one cannot have the capacity to know the other. Self knowledge is the *sine qua non* of loving and accepting the self. Jesus' own answer to the query of the scholar of the law was "you shall love your neighbor as *yourself*" (Mt 22:39). Loving another is possible only to the degree you love yourself. Self love is not contrary to Christian spirituality but selfish love is.

Self knowledge not only provides an unprejudiced view of oneself and others but also gives the ability to have a feeling connection with oneself and others. Gifted with such a view, one is able to transcend personal needs and concerns and is moved by the need of other. Self knowledge includes intuitive and cognitive insights as well as a total willingness to respond to another person in love. It has the quality to anticipate the needs and desires of others and demonstrate reverence to the needs and preferences of others. The story of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:29-37) reveals these aspects of self knowledge. The priest and Levite who passed by the suffering man did not lack *knowledge* in their specific fields of profession. In their pursuit for ritual purity, they missed the "feeling connection"; and they are, in fact, not *passing by* the poor man but their own *true selves.* During an audience in April 2016, Pope Francis said: "You can know the whole Bible, you can know all the liturgical rubrics, you can know all theology, but that theology does not make loving automatic." Surprisingly, it is the pagan Samaritan-not the pious Jewish priest and Levite- who proves a neighbor to the needy person. It is precisely because the Samaritan was a person at home with himself – a man with better self knowledge. In him, we see not merely an external show of compassion but compassion that stems from the inner eye of love. Thus he shows the fundamental attitude- a stance of the heart- that motivates all loving, whatever its pattern or expression. Without that inner eye of love one cannot become a vessel of mercy.

3. Self disclosure- Opening the door of the heart

In *Miseriocordiae Vultus,* Pope Francis states that the Jubilee year is a "time to allow our hearts to be touched." Immediately questions emerge: Touched by what or whom? Where is my heart? What is there in my heart? What needs to be touched? How do I bring my heart to be touched? How do I allow the heart to be touched? Heart, in all cultures of the world, is considered to be the center of emotion. Predominantly, it is associated with affection and love expressed in myriad ways. Heart also refers to the inherent goodness seeded in us at our birth. Therefore, for the pope, the" heart to be touched" is the inherent goodness that is hidden within our hearts. It has to be awakened and set at motion towards serving others in mercy. Allowing our hearts to be touched, therefore, means the opening of the heart-door to bring out this goodness to share it with others. Then you no longer touch the other with your hand but only with your heart.

Let us examine a few Biblical stories. The Book of Samuel provides a classical example: One day, Nathan the prophet arrives to narrate a story to King David. David gives a good listening and at the end of the narration, the Scripture tells that king David "grew angry" (sam12:5) at the injustice of the rich man to a poor farmer. David is moved by the plight of the poor farmer. As king, David takes the prerogative to pass the judgment: restitution and death. However, the story does not end there. The real story only begins when the reigning king hears the final words of the courageous prophet: "You are the man" (Sam 12:7). David's heart is touched- touched deeply by God's word. Psalm 51, as all of us know, beautifully captures the profundity of David's experience. David allows his heart of sin to be touched by God's heart of mercy. The door of his heart opens to show forth the goodness hidden within his authentic self.

The suffering of Job and the humiliation of living by a series of personal tragedies is one of the moving stories in the Bible. In Job, we find a human heart fully set on God. He testifies that no personal tragedies can ever move his heart from its centre- God. Jonah is another example. His heart was set on the destruction of the people of Nineveh. He did not desire their salvation- too wicked, as they were for him. After traversing through a tumultuous spiritual experience, Jonah allows his heart to be touched by the merciful heart of God. In that embrace of God, Jonah too is able to embrace the people of Nineveh. Personal experience of mercy is crucially important to reaching out to others in mercy. The truth is that God has been merciful to us. The failure to grasp the depth of God's mercy hinders us from showing mercy to others.

The rich young man in Luke's Gospel (18:18ff) provides another facet of human heart. A good person by any given ordinary standards- devout, strict adherence of laws, faithful to the practices- the rich young man demonstrates a heart which is set on the values of God's kingdom. Though he looks a bit self- satisfied, yet there lurks a hidden longing in his heart for something more: "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" A heart that is set on right priorities is a heart that is permeated by divine grace. However, human cooperation is inevitable for the divine grace to grow within us. Unfortunately, wealth prevented this young man from opening the door of his heart. Had he allowed the door of his heart to be opened, he would have walked into a newer freedom and an enriching life. But he missed it altogether. We could keep reflecting on numerous other stories in the Bible to expound further what it entails to allow our hearts to be touched. However, more important is the question: what wealth prevents me from opening my heart to God and others?

The need to be understood, accepted and loved is one of the deepest in the human heart. However, we will only be known and loved as we really are, in so far as we are willing to reveal our true selves to others. Revealing of our true selves will be possible only to the extent that we are in touch with the deeper things in our own hearts. Hence, allowing our hearts to be touched involves self disclosure. Self disclosure requires certain honesty with oneself- awareness of one's feelings, owning up the feelings, and expressing them in responsible ways. Without the capacity to disclose the truth about ourselves one can never grow in relationship with God or others. Job, Jonah, rich young man and similar characters in the biblical stories are excellent examples of self disclosure. They open out their hearts to God in a relationship of trust, love and confidence. They don't remain spectators of the sufferings of others or their own. Our hearts also would be moved at the face of evil and unjust systems, in the cry of the poor and the voiceless, and in the suffering of others. The pain of the other would be felt within our body and that experience has the power to take us to the undreamed 'peripheries' with unimaginable strength to do the incredible for the other without counting personal cost or the need.

Consider the quality of our prayer life. Is there true a self disclosure there? What is the quality of my life in the community? How do I relate with everyone? How many persons really know me through and through? Is there an ambience in our religious communities for the heart- talk to flourish? Fear can stand in the way of self disclosure. Consider also the quality of missionary life. In whose mission are we participating? Is it my own mission or the mission entrusted to the community? Have I reduced it to a personal mission? When we examine our vocational call, it is clear that the tug of the high ideals of missionary life that led us to our Congregation. Where have those ideals gone? When we let our formation program assist formees to grow in self disclosure we can be certain that we are in the process of preparing genuine vessels of mercy. And to the extent we reverentially respect self disclosure among members and promote it in our daily living, we shall never lack ministers of mercy in our communities. Don't we stand in need of mercy first of all in our communities before we launch out to the frontiers? The Gerasene Demoniac in the gospel (Mk 5:1-20), on receiving the healing, wanted to remain with Jesus. Jesus commands him: “Go home to your family and announce to them all that the Lord in his pity has done for you” (19). Proclaim mercy first of all to the members living in our communities! Without this, our proclamation of mercy to others- however salutary they may be- makes no sense at all.

4. Openness to Change and Renewal

Gospels narrate several accounts of people's encounter with Jesus. All encounters have been life changing to the persons. No encounter has left any individual without being touched deeply and personally by Jesus. In each encounter, the touch of Jesus has been distinct - guilt taken away, hope instilled, healing granted. In a word, each life is restored to its full dignity and to their original beauty. They have been made loveable and they go transformed and changed forever by each encounter. Let us take a couple of examples from the Scriptures. The story of Zacchaeus, the tax collector (Lk 19:1-10), is well known. The deepest longing in his heart takes him to the top of the Sycamore tree- just to have a glimpse of Jesus who was passing by. The story tells us that he receives more than his heart longed for. This 'outcast' could not have expected the greatest of teachers to come home. The presence of Jesus in his home touches the heart of Zacchaeus. What a joy! He does not remain mute to the divine touch. The filthy rich Zacchaeus opens up his heart to the Master, and

unfolds a plan for restoring his relationship with everyone. Zacchaeus emerges a new person since that encounter with the Master. Change occurs when mercy meets us. The Woman at the Well (Jn 4:4-42), on encountering Jesus at the bright noon day, begins on an extraordinary disclosure of herself. Jesus too responds to that self disclosure profoundly. In the 'desert' of her life, the Samaritan woman finds an oasis of mercy- Jesus. Touched by the merciful heart of Christ, she embarks on an unimaginable mission: proclaiming the messiah. The Samaritan woman becomes an apostle to her own people. Only a person who has experienced mercy of God can truly be apostle of mercy to others. Pope Francis wishes that the Jubilee Year becomes "a time when the witness of believers might grow stronger and more effective." And the Samaritan woman proves herself to have grown stronger in faith and effective in her witness. When we let Jesus into our innermost part of our being, we become new persons of substance and admiration.

Like the Tenants in the Gospel parable (Mk 12/1-12), a mission is entrusted to our common undertaking. As religious each of us is called to give a total personal commitment to this mission. Think of the missions we have started with great initial enthusiasm. How come the mission gets a backseat as we continue our journey? When personal goals take precedence over the mission, there sets the danger zone. In no time, our communities find embroiled in clash of rights and privileges; squabble over possessions; and conflict of authority and power. In the pursuit of selfish interest, the common mission is neglected by everyone. A closer look at our communities will reveal the emptiness and insincerity of our consecrated lives as religious and priests. Each of us must genuinely answer the question: Is my consecrated witness growing stronger and effective? If not what shall I do to make it stronger and effective. Pope Francis has no hesitation to tell us that the Jubilee Year is the "opportune moment to change our lives." In a sudden and unexpected experience, some people do make changes in their lives but often they last not for too long, or at times, only surface change is made. We are called to make genuine change- not a cosmetic change. Change and renewal need to take place, first of all, in us before we desire it in others. The power to change and renewal is hidden in us. Authentic change is promising only when we allow our hearts come home to the Mercy- Jesus, the merciful face of the Father. Then the vessel of mercy would not go empty, nor will the oasis of mercy run dry.

Conclusion

Dioceses, parishes, and communities throughout the world have begun to organize activities and programs to assist the faithful to live lives steeped in mercy everywhere- in families, communities and working places. In these days, articles highlighting various aspects of the Jubilee Year continue to appear in several church publications. Moreover, a lot of resources on the Jubilee Year are also available in the market. It is very clear that the Jubilee Year has invigorated interest of all the faithful, and the entire Church appears to be in the experience of re-birth. Each of us, in our innermost being, must also experience the power of this rebirth, and then live it in our life and ministry.

I have dealt very briefly on the sources that are within in each of us. With the gift of the Spirit of God, these resources would help us understand who we are and the purpose for which we are here. Yet, I wonder whether consecrated persons have an inclination to devalue themselves and their gifts. The truth is that all of us have distinct gifts that could enrich our world. With the spirit of God working in

us, we have to grow in gifts as well as to place them at the service of others. At times, there is a tendency among us even to forget the richness of the specific charism of our Congregations. In the pursuit of efficiency and professionalism, we seem to embrace easily the values and ways of the corporate world. We seem to consider practices such as, meditation, examination of conscience, (I would add, examination of *consciousness,* because many things are done too routinely), personal prayer, mortification, self denial and service- that have nurtured our commitment and ministry for ages as no longer valuable to our witness in the modern world. Surprisingly, this is happening at a time when the corporate world- the most modern of the lot- is discovering much wisdom in those or similar practices; and even using those methods to improve the quality of their personnel and excellence in their service. The inner resources we have discussed earlier - identity, self knowledge, self disclosure, and a heart open to change and renewal- are closely linked to the time-tested practices of religious communities. A genuine restoration of these practices in our communities, and an increased awareness of the sense of the sacred in our life and ministry would lead us to a fresh awareness of being vessels of mercy; nay, an oasis in the desert of the modern culture. We need to believe first of all that we are capable of God-like behavior and attitude. The Jubilee Year calls us to have faith in ourselves, and also to value the God-given potential that is within us. To that journey, we shall remain ever committed.

Pope Francs believes that people of our times need the proclamation of mercy and has used a variety of metaphors- ministers of mercy, heralds of mercy, oasis of mercy, vessels of mercy- to explain the nuances of the mystery of mercy we are constantly called to mediate upon. No wonder, at the very centre of *Misericordiae Vultus,* the Pope places the revolutionary challenge: "wherever the church is present, the mercy of the Father must be evident. In our parishes, communities, associations and movements, in a word, wherever there are Christians, everyone should find an oasis of mercy. At the end of the Jubilee Year, we would hear amazingly inspiring stories of mercy lived out by individuals and practiced by communities. We may also have our own stories to narrate. But the stories of mercy shall not end. The story of our life, "steeped in mercy" must continue; and to people everywhere, we must become vessels of mercy- full to the brim, and always flowing out.

END NOTE

i. Extraordinary Jubilee refers to those that are called by Popes with a focus on a particular theme or topic. Ordinary jubilees are called to celebrate the memory of a particular event.

ii. *Misericordiae Vultus* (The Face of Mercy), the official document of the church regarding the extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, was given by Pope Francis on 11th April 2015, the vigil of the second Sunday of Easter, or the Divine Mercy Sunday. Cf. *Misericordiae Vultus*, Bull of Indiction of the extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, Liberia Editrice, Vaticana, (2015).

iii. Jorge Borgoglio (Pope Francis) was consecrated bishop of Buenos Aires on 27 June 1992. His Episcopal motto was an inspiration from the homily of venerable Bede on the feast of St Mathew: *Vidit ergo Jesus publicanum, et quia miserando atque eligendo vidit, ait illi.'Sequere me*'. [Jesus therefore sees the tax collector, and since he sees by having mercy and by choosing, he says to him, follow me.] Cf. Michael Collins, *Francis, Bishop of Rome- A short biography*. Claretian publications, Bangalore, India, 2013. This theme of mercy directed Borgoglio's life and ministry as a bishop. Now in his leadership as the bishop of Rome, it is taken to the entire church.

iv. *Misericordiae Vultus,* No. 12
v. *Misericordiae Vultus* No.3
vi. In *Misericordiae Vultus*, Pope uses a number of images and metaphors. The Vessel of Mercy is used in the second meditations given by Pope during the retreat for Priests. Cf. en.radiovaticana..va/news/…/pope_francis…meditation_for…/1234296.
vii. *Misericordiae Vultus* No.4
viii. *Misericordiae Vultus* No.5
ix. A lot of insights on self knowledge, growing in self knowledge, and self acceptance have come from the lectures and practical sessions at Institute of St Anselm, Kent, UK. The thoughts shared here on these themes are mostly gathered from the sessions.
x. Know thyself!" the inscription at Delphi, in the ancient Greece is often referred to. Plato maintains that "self knowledge is the very essence of knowledge". Cf. As quoted *in Intimacy, and the hungers of the heart,* p.25.
xi. *Interior castle*, *1 chap.2, nos, 8, 9*.
xii. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church.* Cf. Article 2340
xiii. John K. Ryan (1960),*The Confessions of St Augustine 10,8. A Division of Doubleday& Company, Inc. Garden City, New York.*
xiv. Joyce Rupp uses the metaphor of door to write an excellent book under the title, *Open the Door- a journey to the True Self*, Asian Trading Corporation, Bangalore, India. 2008
xv. *Misericordiae Vultus*, No. 19
xvi. *Misericordiae Vultus* No.3
xvii. *Misericordiae Vultus* No.19
xviii. Ever since the starting of the Jubilee Year, Pope Francis himself has constantly expanded the theme of mercy both in his public and private audiences and meetings. The Pontifical Council for the promotion of the New Evangelization has published a series of resource material (8 booklets), which are made available by St Paul's Publications, India. CRI India's *Year of Mercy: Focus Areas: 40 Action Plans*, prepared by Fr Joe Mannath SDB is another excellent resource material. Recently, this was sent to all the major superiors of India.
xix. *Misericordiae Vultus* No.12

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HOUSE TOP
MSMHC Missionary Journal

Ambassadors of God's Mercy, leading people to hope and freedom

Sr. Mary Thdavanal MSMHC

On one of my walks along the seashore I stood watching friends enjoying themselves in the sea close to the shore within a protected area … gradually my gaze turned to the vast expanse of the sea. For a moment I thought if I were carried into that open sea away from the protection what would happen to me! Suddenly I felt fear gripping me, as if I were already there without any control over the great waters drawing me away from the shore… my imagination went wild and the fear increased. I realized, pondering over that experience, that much of our fears are based on unrealistic imagination often caused by earlier experiences of insecurity, which are not addressed! Speaking of experiences of people in the sea Ruth Burrows says it is to the immense sea that is 'God' "we must commit ourselves and let ourselves be carried away. We may feel it terrifying. What will he do with us? Where will he carry us?" could be questions rising within us.

But we have someone to look up to. He has give us the definite assurance, "I am the Way…"

He faced many a frightening situation as we do but we do not see him faltering for a moment. He had an amazing composure about him! He trusted his Father and believed his promises. Even when he felt forsaken and abandoned, left in darkness with no one capable of understanding what he was going through he believed his Father was with him. He let his positive, loving experiences of his Father stay with him. In the light of those experiences his fears faded away. Jesus who faced the reality of being human (Lk 2:52) learned to trust the Father through his daily experiences. This unswerving trust in the Father made it possible for him to go through indescribable suffering, agony, betrayal, loneliness. He believed the Father spoke the truth when he said, 'This is my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased'. He believed "I am not alone but the Father is with me" (Jn 16:32) He believed in the Father's assurance that he would triumph over death and pain (Rev 3:21). He did not rely on human promise of loyalty (Mt 26:35). He knew too well human frailty!

Declaring the year of Mercy (8 December 2015 – 20 November 2016) the Holy Father, Pope Francis exclaims, "How much I desire that the year to come will be steeped in mercy, so that we can go out to every man and woman, bringing the good news and tenderness of God!" (MV 5) Pope Francis, a personification of Mercy, models for us how to be merciful in word and deed to every person irrespective of who one is. Our being merciful needs to be three fold: Mercy towards self, to the community in which we live and to the world outside.

It seems to me that fear and compassion do not go together. It is fear that prevents us form facing ourselves, to answer the basic question, 'who am I'! The most basic fear is the fear that we are alone and so we feel the need to be attached to someone to make us feel good. People's comments about us become of paramount importance in our feeling secure and safe. The inner emptiness is really scary that we play all kinds of tactics, most of the time unconsciously to get ourselves accepted, to feel

important, to hear a word of appreciation and admiration especially from those who matter to us. In addition wherever possible we build comfort zones and niches consciously or unconsciously where we can pamper ourselves pretending everything is fine with us.

In the hustle of all the noise we create to feel good, the only voice we need to hear dies out: "Fear not …". For every day of the year the Lord has a 'fear not' verse. It is inevitable that we face ourselves and deal with the fears that keep us bound prisoners within ourselves. Being merciful to ourselves requires this of us. By ourselves we can do nothing. But everything is possible to those who believe. God's arms are open wide to embrace us into his unending love, a love that knows no bounds. The prodigal son was gathered into the arms of the Father never giving a moment for him to feel remorse for what he did! This incomprehensible mercy is what each of us is invited to experience during this holy year of mercy. Can we take the chance to forgive ourselves for whatever we feel guilty about? Can we permit ourselves to believe that we have been raised to the position of God's own Son, and that we are a people anointed and set apart and that we are given the extraordinary riches of his grace which can satisfy all our needs? What we are is God's work. He has created us in Christ Jesus for the good works, which he has prepared beforehand, that we should devote ourselves to them (Eph 2).

To bring about a change within us and around us the most essential requirement is to forgive: forgive ourselves and others. "F word", a forgiveness project founded and directed by Marina Cantacuzino quotes the story of Bassam Aramin who became involved in the Palestine struggle as a boy growing up in the ancient city of Hebron. He narrates, "As a child I fought the Israeli occupation by raising the Palestinian flag in our playground. We never felt safe. Our homes were invaded and the children were killed. At the age of 12, I joined a demonstration where a boy was shot by a soldier. I watched him die in front of me.

From that moment I developed a deep need for revenge. I became part of a group whose mission was to get rid of the catastrophe that had come to our town. We called ourselves freedom fighters, but the outside world called us terrorists. We came across some discarded hand-grenades in a cave and hurled them at the Israeli jeeps. Two of them exploded and we were caught and imprisoned in 1985. I was 17 and received a seven-year prison sentence. On October 1, 1987, 120 of us were waiting to go into the dining room and over a hundred armed soldiers appeared and ordered us to strip naked. They beat us until we could hardly stand. I was held the longest and beaten the hardest. What struck me was that all the soldiers wore smiles on their face. They were beating us without hatred, because for them this was just a training exercise and they saw us as objects.

As I was being beaten I remembered a movie I watched the year before about the holocaust. As I began watching the movie I wished Hitler had killed them all so that I would never be sent to the prison. But some minutes into the movie I found myself crying that the Jews were sent to the gas chamber without fighting back. I slowly realized that the Israeli oppression was because of the holocaust and I decided to try and understand who the Jews were. This led to a conversation with a prison guard. It was the start of a dialogue and a friendship. Seeing how this transformation happened through dialogue and without force made me realize that the only way to peace is through non-violence. Our dialogue enabled us both to see each other's purity of heart and good intent. But on 16 January 2007, my 10-year-old daughter, Abir, was shot in cold blood by an Israeli soldier while standing outside her school with some classmates. She had just bought a candy at the store and hadn't had time to eat it. I think if I hadn't such strong beliefs and principles anger would have

taken over. Abir's murder could have led me down the easy path of hatred and vengeance, but for me there was no return from dialogue and non-violence".

Our challenge as missionaries is to witness to mercy, to truth, to become God bearers, to help people understand that beyond this mundane world there is a world of eternity where "everyone is a first born". Serenity and peace will come to us only when we step into the other person's shoes and understand his/her point of view, his/her own struggles and pains. Our perceptions are different depending on a number of factors. We may be convinced of our being right but the other person also feels the same. Both have partial truths. Only when we step into the feelings of the other with empathy we can know the truth of the other person, and with understanding look at the person and begin to be merciful in our dealings and mannerisms.

The Pope's invitation to be merciful requires serious introspection. Our communities are the first places where we need to exercise mercy if we are to become merciful to the world outside. All of us are wounded and we all carry hurts from the past which keep festering at the fresh hurts inflicted by each other. Unless we transcend our small world of fears and anxieties and trust the promises of God we can never reach the larger horizons of our lives beyond our narrow vision. Only then we can become merciful towards others, feel the pain of another, and can empathize with their legitimate hungers and accompany them on their way to finding God at the heart of their lives. It is a psalm of lamentations that rise from most members for what they are not given, for what they have been subjected to and so on. There is much emptiness within, clamoring to be filled in. This leads to collisions and unhappiness while precious time ebbs away. The dire need of our communities today is to show mercy towards one another especially by the superiors. There are members dying each moment cut by the sharp sword of negativity, fatal criticism, harsh judgments and cold treatment without a trace of feeling remorse. Gossipers thrive in our communities despite Pope's warning about gossips. Their words are taken for gospel truth and judgment is passed on the members without any verification. Innocents go on suffering while the erring ones become hardened in their hearts left to become rebels. What they need is not judgment but mercy. Life can sprout and grow only on understanding and kindness, mercy and compassion. The year of mercy will do no good with our lengthy prayers and novenas when our hearts are seething with anger and gloat over the machinations accomplished successfully to nail another down.

Bassam Aramin gives us a clue to where to begin the healing process, which can lead to compassionate communication and life giving relationships: dialogue. Can we take the first step to initiate a dialogue with the persons in the community we find difficult to get along and to forgive? The church and the society look towards us religious for models in this regard. "The whole Church greatly depends on the witness of communities filled "with joy and with the Holy Spirit" she wishes to hold up before the world the example of communities in which solitude is overcome through concern for one another, in which communication inspires in everyone a sense of shared responsibility, and in which wounds are healed through forgiveness, and each person's commitment to communion is strengthened". (Vitae Consecrata 45)

The Apostolic exhortation of Pope Francis flowing from his heart of mercy is a grace knocking at our doors to re-visit the reason for founding our congregation and to reset our goals in alignment with our vision. We the MSMHC are primarily evangelizers. Evangelization and Catechesis is our primary charism. Sharing his thoughts on Pope Francis' apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*

Bishop Robert Barron (The Catholic World Report via CNUA) recalls an advice given to his seminarians in Mundelein Seminary by the late Francis Cardinal George "it is insufficient simply to drop the truth on people and then smugly walk away. Rather, he insisted, you must accompany those you have instructed; committing yourself to helping them integrate the truth that you have shared". For us the MSMHC this is a great work of mercy neglected regrettably. If we were successful evangelizers the situation of families today would not have been what it is today.

The words addressed to the shepherds are rather strong. "Shepherds, the Lord Yahweh says this: Disasters are in store for the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Are not shepherds meant to feed a flock? Yet you have fed on milk, you have dressed yourselves in wool, you have sacrificed the fattest sheep, but failed to feed the flock. You have failed to make the weak sheep strong, or to care for the sick ones, or bandage the injured ones. You have failed to bring back strays or look for the lost. On the contrary you have ruled them cruelly and harshly. For lack of shepherd they have been scattered, to become the prey of all the wild animals" (Ez 34: 2-6).

Without possessing hearts like that of the Good Shepherd we certainly cannot care for another nor lead anyone to the happiness his or her hearts are looking for. The role we have to play is one of wounded healers. While we make all efforts to move beyond our hurts we cannot accompany anyone on his/her journey to inner freedom and hope. Fr. Michael Lapsley of Cape Town, who lost both hands, one eye and the eardrums shattered in a letter bomb received in a post in 1990, while he was living in Zimbabwe says, "I realized that if I was filled with hatred and desire for revenge I'd be a victim forever. If we have something done to us, we are victims. If we physically survive we are survivors. Sadly, many people never travel any further than this. I did travel further, going form victim to survivor, to victor. To become a victor is to move from being an object of history to become a subject once more. That is not to say that I will not always grieve what I've lost, because I will permanently bear the marks of disfigurement. Yet I believe I've gained through this experience. I realize that I can be more of a priest with no hands than with two hands".

Fr. Michael developed a program called the Healing of Memories. His workshops explore the effects of South Africa's past at an emotional, psychological and spiritual level. During this year of mercy, can we start something like this in our own communities and may be our neighbourhood a project that creates space for people to share their agonies and hurts, that initiates forgiveness, builds relationships, generates oasis of comfort and relief where people can refresh themselves physically, mentally, psychologically and spiritually? This can lead people to hope and freedom and bubble with life to bring out life in others.

HOUSE TOP
MSMHC Missionary Journal

The Face of Christ Resembles the Mercy, Love and Tenderness of His Father

Bishop Salvadore Lobo, Baruipur

"God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him may not be lost, but may have eternal life." Jn. 3:16

Pope Francis has declared this year as The Year of Mercy. In the Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, Pope Francis has described the most salient features of mercy, focusing primarily on the theme of the light of Christ's face. Mercy is not an abstract word, but rather a face to recognize, contemplate and serve. The Bul l "*Misericordiae Vultus*", says, "Mercy is the very foundation of the Church's life" (No.10). The opening of the Year of Mercy, coincides with the 50th anniversary of the closing of the Vatican II Council: "The Church feels a great need to keep this event alive. With the Council, the Church entered a new phase of her history. The Council Fathers strongly perceived, as a true breath of the Holy Spirit, a need to talk about God to men and women of their time in a more accessible way. The walls which too long had made the Church a kind of fortress were torn down and the time had come to proclaim the Gospel in a new way" (No. 4). The conclusion will take place "with the liturgical Solemnity of Christ the King on 20 November 2016. On that day, as we seal the Holy Door, we shall be filled, above all, with a sense of gratitude and thanksgiving to the Most Holy Trinity for having granted us an extraordinary time of grace. We will entrust the life of the Church, all humanity, and the entire cosmos to the Lordship of Christ, asking him to pour out his mercy upon us like the morning dew, so that everyone may work together to build a brighter future." (no.5). The Face of Christ Resembles the Mercy, Love and Tenderness of His Father "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him may not be lost, but may have eternal life." Jn. 3:16

The Holy Door was opened by the Pope at St. Peter's on 8 December, and on the following Sunday in all the Churches of the world. It is the Pope's desire that this Jubilee be celebrated in Rome as well as in the local Churches; this will give due focus to the life of individual Churches and their needs, in such a way that the initiatives will not place an extra burden on local Churches, but will blend into their calendars and usual activities very naturally. Also, for the first time in the history of the Jubilee tradition, there will be an opportunity for individual dioceses to open a Holy Door - the Door of Mercy - either in the Cathedral or in a church of special significance or a shrine of particular importance for pilgrimages. The Holy Father explains the various salient features of the Jubilee: firstly, the motto, "Merciful like the Father", then the meaning of pilgrimage and above all the need for forgiveness. The theme that is particularly close to the Pope's heart is found in section No. 15: the works of corporal mercy such as feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, welcoming a stranger, healing the sick, visiting the prisoner and burying the dead and the spiritual works of mercy such as to counsel the doubtful, instruct the ignorant, admonish the sinners, comfort the afflicted, forgive the offences, bear patiently those who do ill to us and pray for the living and the

dead(MV 15), are to be resumed in order to "reawaken our conscience, too often grown dull in the face of poverty. Blessed Teresa of Kolkata has shown us the way in practicing mercy of God in our daily lives. She is hailed as the champion of love and compassion of Christ. According to her, by physically caring for, cleaning up the wounds, and washing the unclean bodies of the dying destitute, we are actually touching the body of Christ. She firmly believed that whatever service she gave to the poorest of the poor, she did it to Christ.

One of the highlights of The Year of Mercy is forgiveness. Christian forgiveness is always tempered by justice. Shakespeare in his play Merchant of Venice had reminded us,

"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:
It is mightiest in the mightiest; 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 enthroned 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."

Jesus came to liberate us from everything that distances us from the love of God. He came to free us from the bonds of sin. Let us celebrate Christmas keeping before us the merciful love of God. Our blessed Mother, Mary, is the best example to imitate. Let us keep before our mind the saying of Jesus, "Be merciful as the Heavenly Father is merciful."

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MSMHC Missionary Journal

Bishop Stephen Ferrando: An Apostle of Mercy

Sr. Elizabeth Mao MSMHC

Introduction

The solemn declaration of the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy by Pope Francis propels the Missionary Sisters to explore the life of Bishop Stephen Ferrando as an apostle of mercy[1] which is anticipated unassumingly in his episcopal motto: Apostle of Christ. Sr. Philomena Mathew records the reminiscence of Bishop Ferrando in her book, *A Man Sent by God* that says people today remember him not because he was a great intellectual genius or a great builder, but rather as a good bishop who loved his people and who went out to meet them[2]. Bishop Ferrando was an inspiration particularly to his contemporaries. This short article attempts to bring to fore some of the distinctive features of Bishop Ferrando as an apostle of mercy. It is preceded by a brief discussion on the meaning and significance of Apostle, Mercy and Apostle of Mercy without entering into deep doctrines.

1. Who is an Apostle?

There has been a considerable study and debate over the social origins of the word apostle and more significantly over the criteria for apostleship and the nature of the authority. The Greek word *Apostolos* (apostle) broadly refers to a "messenger, delegate," or "sent one."[3] The NT use is continuous with the OT idea of a special messenger from God (cf. 2 Kgs 2:2; 2 Sam. 24:13). The term has a variety of specific senses in the NT, but special messenger, particularly from God best captures the dominant sense. The Vatican II in its document on the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum* clearly spells out how the Twelve Apostles and other Apostles[4] faithfully fulfilled the commission of Jesus (cf. Mt 28:19-20; Mk 16:15) by their oral preaching, by example, and observances handed on what they had received from the lips of Christ,[5] "As the Father has sent me so I send you" (Jn 20:21).

1. Please see, ***Philomena MATHEW, "Reflections on the life of Bishop Ferrando, as an Apostle of Christ," in Acts of the General Council (AGC), Vol. 6/2 Jul-Dec 2016, 9-25.***
2. Philomena MATHEW, *A Man Sent By God*, 141.
3. William D. MOUNCE, (ed.), *Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words*, 27.
4. Within Paul's letters, where the term is found more frequently than in any other part of the NT, *apostolos* does not refer to the Twelve alone but generally to an honoured group of believers with special status as God's messengers or envoy (See, MOUNCE, *Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words*, 27).
5. *DV*, 7.

2. What is Mercy?

The word "mercy" in the common parlance denotes the choice of a dominant person not to punish another. This is clearly not what mercy means with respect to God the Father of Jesus Christ. Our English word is a translation of the Latin *misericordia* which can best be translated as the heart that shares another's misery. Pope Benedict XVI in his homily on Mercy Sunday 2008 emphasized mercy as the life line of Christian life. He says that mercy is the nucleus of the Gospel message. In fact, it is the very name of God Himself, the face of God which he revealed himself in the OT and more fully in Jesus Christ through his incarnation of creative and redemptive love. This love of mercy also illuminates the face of the Church, and is manifested through the Sacraments, in particular that of the Reconciliation, as well as in the works of charity, both of the community and individual. In short, everything that the Church says and does is a manifestation of God's mercy towards humanity[6]. In the Papal Bull *Misericordiae Vultus*, Pope Francis maintains that if mercy is to be efficacious and meaningful, we need to contemplate constantly on the mystery of mercy as on it rests our salvation[7].

3. Apostle of Mercy

The document of Vatican II on the Decree of the Apostolate of the Laity *Apostolicam Actuositatem* reiterates the message of the Gospel that the greatest commandment in the law is to love God with one's whole heart and one's neighbour as oneself (cf. Mt 22:37-40). Christ made this commandment of love of neighbour his own and enriched it with a new meaning. It was his choice to equate himself with his suffering brethren as the object of this love when he said, "As long as you did it for one of these, the least of my brethren, you did it for me" (Mt 25:40)[8]. The document cited above clearly teaches that to be an apostle of mercy is an on-going invitation to all the faithful. Pope Francis beautifully defines apostles of mercy thus, *"*Being *apostles of mercy* means touching and soothing the wounds that today afflict the bodies and souls of many of our brothers and sisters. Curing these wounds, we profess Jesus, we make him present and alive; we allow others to touch his mercy with their own hands, to recognize him as "Lord and God" (*Jn* 20:28).[9]"

4. Bishop Ferrando: an Apostle of Mercy

Bishop Ferrando, as an apostle of mercy is evident in his love of God and love of neighbour. The inner strength of Bishop Ferrando was his unfailing recourse to prayer which found expression in his approach to simple native people. All what he was and did was interconnected through the union with his Master. The testimonies of people from various walks of life bear witness to Bishop Ferrando as an apostle of mercy.

6. BENEDICT XVI, Mercy Sunday Homily, Courtyard of the Papal Residence, Castel Gandolfo, Rome, 30 March 2008.
7. *MV*, 2.
8. *AA,* 8.
9. FRANCIS, Mercy Sunday Homily, St. Peter's Square, Rome, 3 April 2016.

4.1. Apostle of Mercy: A Shepherd of Deep Faith and Prayer

The meaning of apostle of mercy in Bishop Ferrando is predefined in his very own episcopal motto: Apostle of Christ; understood in the context of Christ who is full of mercy. Sr. Philomena Mathew aptly describes Bishop Ferrando's nature of apostleship as an intensive, qualitative, interior journey and not merely in terms of tireless apostolic missionary journeys as conceived in a traditional sense[10]. Jesus was in constant communion with his Heavenly Father and became the medium of communication between the Father and his people. Therefore, a true apostle of Christ becomes a medium between Jesus and the people. At the same time the personal experience of the love and mercy of Jesus makes the apostle an effective mediator (cf. 1Jn 1:1-4). In the same way, as a true apostle of Christ, Bishop Ferrando became a medium between Jesus Christ and the people.

Bishop Joseph Mittathany, Archbishop Emeritus of Imphal testifies that Bishop Ferrando had great love for God which was expressed in his love for the Church and missionary evangelization. When Bishop Mittathany came to Shillong as a young priest, he was very much impressed by Bishop Ferrando's prayer life. He would always join the priests for the prayer, regularly attended the retreats and was faithful to all his practices of piety. He nurtured his prayer life through meditation of the Word of God and was exemplary in frequenting the Sacraments especially the Sacrament of Reconciliation and had great devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary. To him Bishop Ferrando was a man of prayer.[11]

Bishop Ferrando lived his ordinary life in an extraordinary manner, touching the lives of others in like fashion. He was a man of deep spirituality[12] whose inner strength is commendable. His deep rootedness in Christ was his source of strength and courage to venture ahead during the turbulent epoch of Northeast India. For this same reason he reminds the Missionary Sisters in his letter, "The beauty and greatness of the Congregation is within you…the inner life is the power and the glory of the Congregation,"[13] and unreservedly the glory of the Lord. A genuine apostle of mercy ultimately renders all glory to the Lord his Master by placing his unconditional faith and trust in God, "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever" (Rom 11:36).

4.2. Apostle of Mercy: A Friend to the Poor and Needy

The document of Vatican II *Apostolicam Actuositatem* upholds the meaning and importance of supporting and aiding the poor and needy as it states, "Pity for the needy and the sick and works of charity and mutual aid intended to relieve human needs of every kind are held in highest honour by the Church."[14] Bishop Ferrando was a true son of the Church who had in his mission the primary concern for the poor and needy. Despite untold deprivations he would not refuse the plea of the poor.

The genuine love for the poor and needy is noteworthy even to the extent of rendering material assistance, whenever and wherever need called for. Mr. George Marbok acquainted Bishop Ferrando since 1938-1969 and he did become one of the recipients of his generosity to pursue his

10. Philomena MATHEW, *A Man Sent by God*, 179.
11. Summarium Testium LIII, *Positio*, 301.
12. *Positio*, 592; Philomena MATHEW, *A Man Sent by God*, 217.
13. Stephen FERRANDO, 16 November 1969, *From the Heart of a Father*, 106.
14. *AA,* 8.

studies. According to him Bishop Ferrando always had a reserved corner for the poor people and frequently visited their homes, especially the sick. Mr. Marbok recalls an event in the life of a certain man named P.R. Kyndiah whom Bishop Ferrando visited at his sick bed. This simple but genuine gesture of Bishop Ferrando touched the man deeply. The very episode transformed and inspired the man to accept Catholicism.[15]

The acknowledgment from (Lt) Archbishop Hubert D' Rosario on Bishop Ferrando is worth a record. The following is an extract from his original announcement letter on the death of Bishop Ferrando, "Archbishop Ferrando has been a builder of the Church in Northeast India and in our Archdiocese in particular. He led our Church through dark and difficult days but as a valiant soldier of Christ, never gave up and succeeded in the end. His love for the people, the poor and the needy in particular, is well known to all."[16] It comes to better light when Bishop Joseph Mittathany confirms Bishop Ferrando's passion for the poor and needy. He states that he had preferential love for the poor. And whenever Bishop Ferrando visited the villages, he found time to meet his people. His love and enthusiasm to promote their cause led him to visit Bishop Mathias, the Archbishop of Madras in search of Seminarians to volunteer for Northeast. When Bishop Ferrando visits any of the parishes, he always found time to meet the people and sincerely showed his solidarity.[17]

A manuscript of Bishop Ferrando's personal testament read: "Sono nato poverissimo, vissi povero, morirò povero" (I was born very poor, lived poor, I will die poor),[18] which speaks volumes of his authenticity and that he preached what he lived. Jesus assures great recompense to those who show mercy to the weak, "And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous" (Lk 14:14).

4.3. Apostle of Mercy: A Companion to the Weak

In the recent Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis speaks of love that has an aspect of deep compassion,[19] sympathetic about the fragility and transitory nature of human relationships starting from families. This throws light on the life of Bishop Ferrando who did possess a God-like heart. He was a compassionate father to the prodigal-like sons and a good shepherd to the strayed sheep. Again Pope Francis confirms that the depth of God's love and patience towards the sinful humanity is a sign of God's real power.[20]

Mrs. Emilda Rymbai has her testimony of Bishop Ferrando who showed her immense compassion. She was a very poor woman with limited source of income to provide for her family. So, she took recourse to selling liquor by opening a liquor shop. In fact, Fr. Tome, the then Parish Priest reprimanded and warned her of the consequences, but at this juncture of her life, she had no alternative means to earn adequate money. Eventually, the Church stopped her from frequenting the Sacraments. It was here that Bishop Ferrando intervened and welcomed her back to the Church

15. Summarium Testium LV, *Positio*, 304.
16. *Positio*, 437-438.
17. Summarium Testium LIII, *Positio*, 302.
18. *Copia Publica* III, 852-858; *Positio*, 435.
19. *AL*, 92.
20. *Ibid.*, 91.

along with her family and permitted to receive the Sacraments. She strongly believes that Bishop Ferrando had the ability to look into her inner disposition rather than judge her action.[21]

Fr. Mauro Casarotti[22] testifies to Bishop Ferrando's capacity to cheer and befriend the weak. Fr. Casarotti, the then Provincial of Kolkata accompanied Bishop Ferrando in the car along with Fr. Mario Bianchi on the day of Bishop Ferrando's departure to Italy for good. Fr.Casorotti sincerely appreciates the benevolent heart of Bishop Ferrando without exaggeration. Fr. Casarotti recounts the following three incidents that took place on that very day of his departure. It was told that a certain priest stayed away from bidding goodbye to Bishop Ferrando neither prior to nor on the day of his departure, for he was not in good terms with the bishop. But as all other priests, this priest too felt compelled to accompany his parishioners to bid farewell to their shepherd. However, the priest stood amidst the crowd, but as the car rolled by, Bishop Ferrando immediately noticed the priest, alighted from the car and went to the priest and greeted him. Fr. Casarotti was greatly surprised by his humility. True love nurtures no rancor. To this end, Fr. Casarotti again witnessed for himself the incidents of the two ex-Salesians priests. Both of them approached Bishop Ferrando in a similar fashion shedding tears, one at Shillong and the other at Nongpoh. As Bishop Ferrando was a man charged with deep compassion, like a true father got down from the car and consoled and blessed them. In short, he was of such a temperament that no one could hurt him and above all he could forgive everyone.[23]

A confirmation comes from the document *Amoris Laetitia* where Pope Francis reminds the faithful that what really makes persons important is a love that understands, shows concern, and embraces the weak.[24] The same document fittingly picks out some of the comforting and compassionate phrases of Jesus, "Take heart, my son (Mt.9:2); "Great is your faith" (Mt 15:28); "Arise" (Mk 5:41); "Go in peace" (Lk 7:50); "Be not afraid" (Mt 14:28).[25]

4.4. Apostle of Mercy: A Cheerful Giver

In the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis clearly spells out the essence of the Gospel, "The joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. With Christ joy is constantly born anew."[26] The spirit of Bishop Ferrando as a cheerful giver goes in harmony with the teaching of the Church; that in Christ we find inexhaustible joy, "That my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete" (Jn 15:11). In *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis reiterates the aspect of true joy that the most intense joys in life arise when one is able to elicit joy in others, as a foretaste of heaven.[27]

21. Summarium Testium XXVIII, *Positio*, 234.
22. Fr. Mauro Casarotti was the Provincial of Calcutta. He knew Bishop Ferrando personally and had a great sense of love and respect for him. Sr. Philomena Mathew, then the Vice-Postulator for the cause of beatification and canonization process of the Venerable interviewed Fr. Mauro on 27/11/1995, *Positio*, 589-592.
23. *Positio*, 291.
24. *AL*, 97.
25. *Ibid.*, 100.
26. *EG*, 1.
27. *AL*, 129.

According to Bishop Ferrando, Christ is the foundation of joy and it belongs to those who love God and neighbour with utmost sincerity. He emphatically exhorts his Daughters to be always of a cheerful disposition as joy belongs to them.[28] Being a man of wisdom, Bishop Ferrando was aware of the consequences of the absence of joy and cautions them in a letter not to let themselves be troubled by anything of ephemeral nature, but only bear in mind their dignity as children of God who loves them as a source of their joy anticipating the great happiness which Jesus Christ stores for them and reminds them of Jesus' words to the apostles after the resurrection, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God" (Jn 20:17). He thus concludes by saying, "It means that his victory is ours, his Father is our Father. His resurrection is our resurrection. We are one with Jesus! This is the foundation of our joy."[29]

A close association with Bishop Ferrando makes Sr. Elizabeth Packumala, recall the source of his endurance and perseverance. She recalls the major odd events and tragedies during the time of Bishop Ferrando. The great fire at St. Mary's Hill, the World War II, internment of about 150 priests, the Independence of India that prevented the entry of missionaries, the expulsion of the foreign priests from the Northeast, the earthquake of 1951, the Chinese War of 1962 were days of trial for the Venerable who wanted to do great things for Christ and his people. He manifested tremendous faith even to the very last moment by willingly submitting to God's will to return to Italy in obedience.[30] Undoubtedly Bishop Ferrando never gave up. He trusted in Jesus who would not let him down, "Prayer is the secret of our joy, happiness and perseverance"[31] despite untold trials. For the same reason he encourages his spiritual daughters to be joyful and go on working for the salvation of souls[32], for "God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor 9:7).

4.5. Apostle of Mercy: A Good Samaritan

In *Misericordiae Vultus,* Pope Francis stresses that God assists us in our weakness.[33] And again in *Amoris Laetitia* he teaches all Christian families how love has to be marked by humility and if they were to understand, forgive and serve others from the heart, their pride has to be healed and their humility has to increase. He says that the inner logic of Christian love is not about the importance and power, rather, he quotes the words of Jesus, "Whoever would be first among you must be your servant" (Mt.20:27)[34]. Rightly so, the logic of being apostles of mercy is grounded in the teaching of the Jesus who said, "You received without payment; give without payment" (Mt 10:8). In the Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, Pope Benedict interprets Saint John that love of neighbour is a path that leads to the encounter with God, and that closing our eyes to our neighbour manifests our blindness to God.[35]

28. Stephen FERRANDO, 24 April 1952, *From the Heart of a Father*, 43.
29. Stephen FERRANDO, 16 April 1952, *From the Heart of a Father*, 42.
30. Summarium Testium LXX, *Positio*, 339.
31. Stephen FERRANDO, 28 February 1978, *From the Heart of a Father*, 162.
32. *Ibid*., 12 March 1978, 163.
33. *MV*, 14.
34. *AL*, 98.
35. *DCE*, 16.

Bishop Ferrando exhorts his Daughters not merely to nurture the attitude of the Good Samaritan but to make it their very own mission. This he does by bringing to fore the example of Jesus who came into the world not to take care of those who are well, but the sick. He affirms that it is Jesus Himself who teaches the Missionary Sisters to be good mothers to the poor children, to be Good Samaritans to the needy and to be healers. And this is how he wanted the Missionary Sisters to realize their great mission[36]. In this regard, he counsels his Daughters to refrain from attachment to creatures which would detract their zest for mission, rather, to let the love of God alone propel them to seek their neighbour in need[37], in the words of St. Paul, the great apostle, "The love of Christ urges us on" (2 Cor 5:14).

Bishop Ferrando was a Good Samaritan par excellence as his life and work testified. Today he remains to be a Good Samaritan in and through the Missionary and Charitable Congregation he had founded; and he will continue to be a Good Samaritan for ages to come in and through his spiritual Daughters who have as their mission: love of God and love of neighbour. This is how the Missionary Sisters sustain and keep alive the spirit of Bishop Ferrando, an apostle of mercy.

At this point of reflection, it is worth recapitulating the Mercy Sunday homily of Pope Francis who emphasized that it would be futile for apostles of mercy without the heart of a Good Samaritan for it is the mission that God entrusts to us. The reason is there are so many people who need to be loved, *listened to and to be understood*. He further emphasizes the importance of the Gospel of mercy which needs to be proclaimed and written in our daily lives, and to seek people with patient and open hearts as Good Samaritans who understand compassion. Thus, to accomplish this mission, the Gospel of mercy requires generous and joyful servants, people who love freely without expecting anything in return.[38]

Conclusion

Bishop Ferrando was true to his motto: Apostle of Christ, which is reflected in his life and work among his people as a Shepherd. He proved to be an authentic apostle of mercy as a result of his intimacy with his Lord and Master, Jesus Christ. He imitated his Master, Jesus Christ, who came to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, to let oppressed go free and to proclaim the Lord's favour (cf. Lk 4:18). He emitted compassion, made God present and alive under the guise of a Good Samaritan to the poor, the needy and the weak. Above all, Bishop Ferrando brought the joy of Christ to all. Reliving the spirit of Bishop Ferrando as an apostle of mercy, we can fittingly uphold that he lived and proclaimed, and trust in the words of Jesus, "Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy" (Mt.5:7).

36. Stephen FERRANDO, 11 April 1973, *From the Heart of a Father*, 178.
37. *Ibid*., 24 April, 1952, 44.
38. FRANCIS, Mercy Sunday Homily, St. Peter's Square, Rome, 3 April 2016.

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Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy: A Theological Point of View

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1. Introduction

Behind the English translation of the word "mercy" lie a number of diverse and rich biblical words in Hebrew (*khesed*, *khanan, rakham*) and in Greek (*charis, eleos, oiktirmos, splanchnon*). These words are also translated as "love" "compassion", "grace", "favour", "kindness", "loving-kindness", and so on, depending on the context. Hence a conceptual approach toward understanding the meaning of "mercy" is best.[39] Thomas Aquinas in *Summa Theologiae* defines mercy as the compassionate sorrow at another's misfortune together with a will to alleviate it; it is genuine love in relation to an unhappy being. The encounter of love and misery gives birth to mercy, which is therefore one of the essential forms of charity, situated in the very heart of Christianity[40]. Pope Francis in *Misericordiae Vultus* says mercy reveals the very mystery of the Most Holy Trinity. It is the ultimate and supreme act by which God comes to meet us and the fundamental law that dwells in the heart of every person who looks sincerely into the eyes of his brothers and sisters on the path of life. It is the bridge that connects God and man, opening our hearts to a hope of being loved forever.[41]

2. Mercy as part of God's character

Mercy is one of the distinguishing characteristics of the nature of God. God is called "the Father of mercies" (2 Cor.1:3), God is "rich in mercy" (Eph 2:4), God's mercy is covenantal faithfulness to his people (1 Kings 8: 23-24), God's mercy is redemptive as seen in the Exodus story where God redeemed the oppressed Israelites from slavery under Pharaoh, (Ex 2: 23-25). Mercy is a manifestation of God's faithfulness to his covenant. Hence, God's mercy to his covenant people never ceases (Ps 119).[42]

Diverse images are used to describe God's mercy. God is compared to a loving father who has compassion on his children (Jer 31:20). His compassion is also compared to that of a nursing mother who feeds her baby at her breast (Is 49:15). The images of the loving father and the loving mother reflect closely the heart of God's mercy toward his chosen people. God is especially merciful to the needy, the weak, the afflicted and the oppressed (Ex 2:23-24; Ps 123: 2-3; Is 49:13; Heb 4: 16). God

39. "Mercy," *The Baker Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed., Tremper Longman III (Michigan: Grand Rapids, 2013), 1133.
40. J. M. Perrin, "Mercy," *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, 2nd ed., gen. ed. Berard L. Marthalered (Washington D.C. : The Catholic University of America, Thomson Gale, 2003), 504.
41. Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus:* The Face of Mercy, Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy (Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House, 2015), 2.
42. "Mercy," *The Baker Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, 1133.

is called "a father to the fatherless" and a defender of widows" (Ps 68:5). Sinners appeal to God for mercy (Ps 51:1). God's mercy is also shown in his act of salvation and blessing (Ex 15:13).[43]

Pope Francis in *Misericordiae Vultus* speaks of the mercy of God not just as an abstract idea, but a concrete reality through which He reveals his love as that of a father or a mother, moved to the very depths out of love for their child. It gushes forth from the depths naturally, full of tenderness and compassion, indulgence and mercy.[44]

3. Mercy in the Old Testament

The Old Testament tells of God's love manifested in His mercy. This was first manifested in freeing His people from their slavery in Egypt. It is the merciful God who tells Moses that He has heard the cry of his enslaved people and that He will deliver them (Ex 3:7-17). However, God's mercy is manifested foremost in forgiving the infidelity of His people. "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love for thousands, forgiving the iniquity and transgression and sin" (Ex 34: 6-7). This text declaring God's mercy is so important that it is repeated in various forms in the Old Testament (Ps 85/86:15, 102/ 103:8; 144/145:8; Jl 2:13; Neh 9:17). The Lord God is a merciful God (Dt. 4:31, Ps 114/116:5), who will not turn away His face to those who return to Him (2 Chr. 30:9). Even though God sent His people into exile, He did not make an end of them or forsake them, for He is a gracious and merciful God (Neh. 9:31). Similar proclamations of God's mercy can be found in the Old Testament.[45]

In the history of salvation, we see that God's mercy and goodness prevail over punishment and destruction. In the Old Testament the words "patient and merciful" go together and describe God's nature. Different Psalms also brings to the fore the grandeur of God's merciful actions (Ps 146:7-9, Ps 103: 3-4). "He heals the broken hearted and binds up their wounds...The Lord lifts up the downtrodden; he casts the wicked to the ground" (Ps 147: 3-6), says the Psalmist.[46] Pope Francis again in *Misericordiae Vultus,* refers to Psalm 136 while speaking of God's mercy. He says the refrain "For His mercy endures forever" is repeated after each verse in the Psalm. By virtue of mercy, all the events of the Old Testament are replete with profound salvific import. Mercy renders God's history with Israel as a history of salvation. To repeat continually "for His mercy endures forever," as the psalm does, seems to break through the dimensions of space and time, inserting everything into the eternal mystery of love. It is as if to say that not only in history, but for all eternity man will always be under the merciful gaze of the Father.[47]

4. Mercy in the New Testament

Misericordiae Vultus begins with the phrase Jesus Christ is the face of the Father's mercy. These words the Pope might well sum up the mystery of the Christian faith. Mercy has become living and

43. Ibid.
44. Francis, 6.
45. T.G. Weinandy, "Mercy of God," *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, 2nd ed., gen. Berard L. Marthaler (Washington D.C. : The Catholic University of America, Thomson Gale, 2003), 506-507.
46. George Arackamyalil, "Summary of *MisericordiaeVultus*: Bull of Indiction of Extra Ordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy," *Aikya Samiksha: Comprehensive Vision of Unity*, XII, 2 October 2015, 10.
47. Francis, 7.

visible in Jesus of Nazareth, reaching its culmination in him. The Father, "rich in mercy" (Eph 2:4), after having revealed His name to Moses as "a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" (Ex 34:6) has never ceased to show, in various ways throughout history, His divine nature. In the "fullness of time" (Gal 4:4), when everything had been arranged according to His plan of salvation, He sent His only Son into the world, born of the Virgin Mary, to reveal His love for us in a definitive way. Whoever sees Jesus sees the Father (Jn 14:9). Jesus of Nazareth, by His words, His actions, and His entire person reveals the mercy of God.[48]

Jesus was the fulfilment of Old Testament promises and prophesies. The mission He received from the Father was to reveal the mystery of divine love in its fullness. Jesus through the signs He worked, especially in the face of sinners, the poor, the marginalized, the sick and the suffering, taught God's merciful love and made it visible and tangible. In the parables devoted to mercy,[49] God is presented as a Father who forgives the wrong and overcomes rejection with compassion and mercy. Through the parable of the ruthless servant, Jesus affirms mercy not only as the action of the Father but also as the criterion to ascertain who His children are. In other words the parable asks us to share gratefully the mercy which we have received from the Father.[50]

In the New Testament, the mercy of God finds its fulfilment in that the "Father of all mercies and the God of all comfort" (2 Cor 1:3) so loved the world that He sent his Son in to the world (Jn 3:16; 1 Jn 4:10). "God who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ" (Eph 2:4). In doing so God remembered His mercy to Israel (Lk 1:54) "to perform the mercy promised to our fathers...to give knowledge of salvation to His people in the forgiveness of their sin, through the tender mercy of our God" (Lk 1:72, 78). Even the Gentiles are now to "glorify God for his mercies" (Rom 15:9). Though Paul was the greatest of sinners, he obtained the mercy of God so as to be the most extreme example and hope of God's mercy to all (1 Tim 1: 13-16). Thus everyone can now see "how the Lord is compassionate and merciful" (Jas 5:11), "for by His great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading" (1 Pet 1: 3-4). Jesus is the everlasting great High Priest to whom we can draw near in confidence "that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb 4:16).

The New Testament accentuates the mercy of God manifested in the face of humankind's sin. It is the cross of Christ that displays most strikingly the mercy of God for through it the Father has granted forgiveness of sins and the divine transforming life in the Spirit. This mercy is exemplified in anticipation of the cross through Jesus' example and miracles. Jesus, in His mercy, has come to call sinners (Mt 9:13, 12:7). Those who desire to be healed cry out to Jesus to have mercy on them (Mt 9:27, 15:22, 17:15, 20:30-31; Mk 10:47-48; Lk 16:24, 18: 38-39), and He, in His mercy, attends to their need. Moreover, Jesus, through the parable of the Prodigal Son, illustrates the utter loving mercy of the Father (Lk 15:11-32). Like the Father then, Christians are called to love and forgive

48. Ibid., 1.
49. Parables devoted to mercy are parables of Lost Sheep (Lk 15:1-7), Lost Coin (Lk 15:8-10), the Father with Two Sons (Lk 15:11-32).
50. Arackamyalil, "Summary of *Misericordiae Vultus*: Bull of Indiction of Extra Ordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy," 10-11.

their enemies. Christian perfection consists in being merciful as the Father is merciful (Lk 6:36; Mt 5:48).[51]

5. Mercy in the Christian Tradition

The rich biblical vocabulary of mercy with its multiple understandings flowed over into early Christian writings. Thus, Clement of Rome depicts God as a God of kindness who longs to show mercy, and he exhorts the Christians of Corinth to beg for that mercy. In the *Didache*, Christians, who are the recipients of God's gracious mercy, are exhorted to show mercy in turn. As prayers of the early Church increasingly came to be written down in the third and fourth centuries, the Mercy of God was a recurring motif. These prayers especially the opening prayers and other such collects often begin: "God of mercies," "Almighty and Merciful God." The petitionary section of the prayers frequently asks for God's mercy or it associates a proclamation of God's mercy with the saving action requested of God. The *kyrieeleison* developed in fourth-century Jerusalem as a spoken response to the community's prayers of intercession and soon spread to other parts of the Christian world. These ways of addressing God are still part of the Church's prayer vocabulary.[52]

The Fathers of the Church continue the biblical theme of God manifesting His mercy through the redemption wrought in His incarnate Son and in the incorruptible life poured out in His Spirit. Irenaeus, in his *Demonstration on the Apostolic Preaching,* states: "To exercise mercy is God's own function." Ambrose, in an astonishing statement, wrote that God did not rest from creating until He had made man, for now He could exercise His mercy, "there now being someone whose sins he could forgive" (In *Hex*., 6.10). Augustine, in his *Confessions,* bears witness to the mercy of God throughout the whole of his life. So much was the mercy of God esteemed within the Church's tradition that Aquinas in *Summa Theologiae,* states that mercy takes precedence of other virtues, for it belongs to mercy to be bountiful to others and what is more, to succour others in their wants, which pertains chiefly to one who stands above. Hence, mercy is accounted as being proper to God: and therein His omnipotence is declared to be chiefly manifested. Mercy is God's greatest virtue because He gives not from any need of His own, but purely and freely from His own loving liberality and kindness. For Aquinas, the chief manifestation of God's omnipotence is enacted through His omnipotent deeds of mercy, that is, in deeds that only He can perform.[53]

Likewise within the Christian tradition the mercy of God is found within the theology of and devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The pierced heart of Jesus not only reveal the immense love and mercy of Jesus himself, but, through His open heart, we are also able to gaze into the merciful heart of the Trinity itself. Equally, more recently Faustina Kowalska, because of her visions, promoted devotion to God's mercy through *The Chaplet of Divine Mercy* and *Novena of Divine Mercy*.[54] The Pope makes a mention of Mary whose entire life was patterned after the presence of mercy made flesh. He says the Mother of the Crucified and Risen One has entered the sanctuary of divine mercy because she participated intimately in the mystery of love. Mary at the foot of the

51. Weinandy, "Mercy of God," 507.
52. Gilbert Ostdiek, "Pastoral-Liturgical Tradition," *The Collegeville Pastoral Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. Carroll Stuhlmueller (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 2005) 612.
53. Weinandy, "Mercy of God," 507.
54. Iid., 507-508.

cross attests that the mercy of the Son of God knows no bounds and extends to everyone, without exception. So he calls on everyone to turn to her so that she may make us worthy to contemplate the face of mercy, her Son Jesus.[55]

6. The Works of Mercy

God's mercy transforms human hearts; it enables us, through the experience of a faithful love, to become merciful in turn. In an ever new miracle, divine mercy shines forth in our lives, inspiring each of us to love our neighbour and to devote ourselves to what the Church's tradition calls the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. These works remind us that faith finds expression in concrete everyday actions meant to help our neighbours in body and spirit: by feeding, visiting, comforting and instructing them. On such things will we be judged.[56] The corporal and spiritual works of mercy must never be separated. By touching the flesh of the crucified Jesus in the suffering, sinners can receive the gift of realizing that they too are poor and in need. But taking this path, the proud, the powerful and the wealthy spoken of in the *Magnificat* can also be embraced and undeservedly loved by the crucified Lord who died and rose for all. This love alone is the answer to that yearning for infinite happiness and love that we think we can satisfy with the idols of knowledge, power and riches.[57]

In the corporal works of mercy we touch the flesh of Christ in our brothers and sisters who need to be fed, clothed, sheltered, visited; in the spiritual works of mercy – counsel, instruction, forgiveness, admonishment and prayer- we touch more directly our own sinfulness.[58] Thus the works of mercy are concerned with the different kinds of needs people ordinarily experience and with ways of helping them. The Catechism of the Catholic Church emphasizes the importance of the Works of Mercy.[59] It states that the works of mercy are charitable actions by which we come to the aid of our neighbour in his spiritual and bodily necessities. Instructing, advising, consoling, comforting are spiritual works of mercy, as are forgiving and bearing wrongs patiently. The corporal works of mercy consist especially in feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned, and burying the dead.[60] The corporal and spiritual works of mercy have their bases in the teachings of Christ and the practice of the Church since apostolic times. In order to love God, our neighbour and ourselves, we must keep the commandments of God and of the Church, and carry out the corporal and spiritual works of mercy.[61]

7. Corporal Works of Mercy

The corporal works of mercy are kind acts by which we help our neighbours with their everyday material and physical needs.[62] Lawrence Pius, in his article, 'Works of Mercy,' beautifully expresses

55. Francis, 24.
56. Jacob Naluparayil, ed. *Smart Companion National Monthly for Christian Leadership*, vol. 7, no. 2 (Kochi: Smart Companion India, February 2016), 17.
57. Ibid., 18.
58. Ibid.
59. George Kaitholil, *Mercy Divine and Human* (Mumbai: St. Pauls, 2015), 107.
60. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1995), 2447.
61. Lawrence Pius, "Works of Mercy – Corporal," *The New Leader*, 16 January 2016, 9.
62. Kaitholil, 107.

that the corporal works of mercy that minister to people's bodily needs are based on Christ's prediction of the last judgement (Mt 25:41). They practically coincide with the various forms of almsgiving. They are:

i. **Feed the hungry**: He stressed on Pope Francis' particular interest in the needs of the poor and what the Bible says about feeding the needy (Mt 25:37-40, Mt 14: 15-21, Jas 2:14-18, Prov 19:17). We must never turn away anyone who is hungry. Those in authority should ensure employment to all. Giving work is the best means for removing the necessity of feeding the unemployed.

ii. **Give drink to the thirsty**: Our Lord says that a cup of water given in His name shall not go unrewarded (Mk 9:40). Giving medicine belongs to this work of mercy. Those who construct or maintain water reservoirs, or who purify drinking water from contamination are giving drink to the thirsty.

iii. **Clothe the naked**: Many make a practice of giving clothes to the poor; giving of other gifts belong to this kind of alms. Seeking to find what society can do to promote better ethical practices in the production of clothing is needed.

iv. **Shelter the homeless**: Those who do this work of mercy are like the Good Samaritan. Those who provide clean and comfortable homes for the poor at low rates of rent practice this work of mercy.

v. **Visit those in Prison**: Those who visit the prisoners in jails and give them instruction and material help are doing a work of mercy. Helping prisoners' families is another work of mercy.

vi. **Comfort the sick**: When we visit the sick, in order to give them temporal or spiritual relief, we do an act of mercy. To build, support, or aid a hospital or a patronage for the sick is a great meritorious act of charity. Doctors and nurses, who perform their duties true to their professional call, please God. Several religious orders have been founded for the express purpose of taking care of the sick, such as the orders founded by Saint John of God and Saint Vincent de Paul.

vii. **Bury the dead**: To attend the funeral, visit a house of mourning, or aid the bereaved family, are works of merit. More so to bury unclaimed bodies.[63]

8. Spiritual Works of Mercy

The spiritual works of mercy are kind acts by which we help our neighbours with their everyday spiritual and emotional needs.[64] The spiritual works of mercy explains Lawrence Pius, are in favour of the soul or spirit of one's neighbour. They are:

i. **Admonish sinners**: Sin affects not just our relationship with God but also as a consequence our relationship with each other. Whenever we think our words may have

63. Pius, "Works of Mercy – Corporal," 9.
64. Kaitholil, 110.

a good effect, we should not hesitate to use them to admonish the erring prudently. While cautioning sinners, we must do so with gentleness and charity. Otherwise we might only produce results which are opposite of what we wish. It would be wrong, if with a little trouble we could have saved a sinner from sin, we did not speak to save him; it would moreover be a loss of great grace for ourselves. "He who causes a sinner to be brought back from his misguided way, will save his soul from death, and will cover a multitude of sins" (Jas 5:20).

ii. **Instruct the ignorant**: This spiritual work focuses on the importance of using the catechism as a tool for teaching the faith. Missionaries, catechists, confessors, Christian writers and teachers – all who teach religion are doing an important work of mercy, and will receive a reward. They that instruct many unto justice shall shine as stars for all eternity (Dan 12:3).

iii. **Counsel the doubtful**: How happy we should be if the word we say helps a doubtful one to become firm in his faith! As in admonishing sinners, advising the doubtful should be done prudently and gently to effect good results. Regarding this spiritual work of mercy, our concern is not about worldly issues but rather our desire is to help the person get back his faith in God and in others.

iv. **Comfort the sorrowful**: We cannot comfort the afflicted by showing them sympathy, by suggesting consolations and by helping them in their need. This work of mercy is similar to curing the sick, since grief is a mental and emotional ailment. To give comfort, we may speak of God's providence, of His love for every single one of His creatures, of the happiness He reserves for us in Heaven, when all earthly sorrows and troubles will be ended. The Church plays the role of extending the spiritual comfort that Jesus himself gave us.

v. **Be patient with those in error**: By being patient with an unjust person, we benefit both ourselves and our fellow-man. Our patience helps him realize his wrongdoing. It is however, wrong to permit others to falsely lay a serious crime to our charge. But let us be patient, for the love of God, praying for the conversion of the sinner.

vi. **Forgive offenses**: We must not seek revenge. "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord" (Rom 12:19). We must forgive others, as we hope God will forgive us. Instead of seeking revenge, those who wish to imitate the saints should go out of their way to do favours to those who injure them. Forgiving others is a necessary part of discipleship and we should follow the example of Jesus when he said, we should forgive offences "not seven times but seventy times seven," (Mt 18:22).

vii. **Pray for the living and the dead**: Prayers are powerful. They bring results. Not one single prayer raised to God from a sincere heart is wasted. Prayers do good not only to those we pray for but to ourselves. Pope Francis has said that the Jubilee Year of Mercy will be a good opportunity for increasing the collaboration between pastors and the laity in the mission of affectionately and tenderly caring for the sick and dying.[65]

65. Pius, "Works of Mercy – Spiritual," 9.

The spiritual works of mercy are based on the teachings and practices of the Church since apostolic times. God can provide us the greatest aid, which is spiritual. Our prayers are the most important form of mercy that we can give. It shows our ultimate dedication to the alleviation of the burdens of others. When we stand before God we will be able to give an account of our prayerful mercy to others so that Jesus will in turn show us mercy. We are called to reach out to others in faith and in love so that we might draw them closer to Christ.[66]

9. Conclusion

Mercy is the very foundation of the Church's life and the very credibility of the Church lies in how she shows merciful and compassionate love. Pope Francis confesses that on account of the temptation to focus on justice, the Church has often forgotten to show and live the way of mercy. He reminds us that without mercy life is fruitless and sterile.[67] Kuriakose Poovathumkudy in his exploratory study of *Misericordiae Vultus*, writes that the Church has been called to be the universal sacrament of salvation in the world. She is the Bride of Christ and is endowed with a specific, definite mission of proclaiming the steadfast love and enduring mercy of God to people of all cultures and languages.[68] Thus we are called to be merciful and compassionate by not judging or condemning but forgiving and giving, by avoiding gossip, envy and jealousy and by reconciling with each other.

In a special way, Pope Francis appeals to us to have a heart open to the fringes of society and bring consolation, mercy and solidarity to people who live in precarious situations and take up the corporal and spiritual works of mercy with joy. We are entrusted with the responsibility of making the Church concretely present among the people through the works of mercy. With the celebration of the Jubilee Year of Mercy, the Church must be transformed into a compassionate mother and merciful teacher to all the nations. She must embrace the whole humanity with the tenderness of love, welcoming everyone into her blossom, so that she may present the whole humanity to the mercy of God.[69]

66. Ibid.
67. Arackamyalil, "Summary of *Misericordiae Vultus*: Bull of Indiction of Extra Ordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy," 11.
68. Kuriakose Poovathumkudy, "Holy Year of Mercy: An Exploratory Study of *Misericordiae Vultus," Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection*, vol.80, no.2. (February 2016), 16.
69. Richard Britto, "A Merciful Church During the Jubilee of Mercy," *The New Leader*, 16 January 2016, 13.

YAC COLUMN

Correct Answers of December 2015

1. Those who keep the commandments and teach others t do the same (Mt 5:19)
2. He/ she would be liable to judgment (Mt 5:22)
3. "Do not to resist an evildoer ; but if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also" (Mt 5:39)
4. We should love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Mt 5:44)
5. To go into our room and shut the door and pray to our Father who is in secret (Mt 6:6)
6. In heaven (Mt 6:20)
7. Because there neither moth nor rust consumes them and thieves do not break in and steal (Mt 6:20)
8. Not to worry about our life; and not to worry about tomorrow (Mt 6:25-34)
9. The example of one who sees the speck in another's eye, while having a log in his /her own eye (Mt 7:3-5)
10. "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you" (Mt 7:12)
11. Good fruit (Mt 7:17)
12. The one who does the will of the Father in heaven (Mt 7:21)
13. Jesus taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes (Mt 7:28)
14. A leper (Mt 8:2)
15. A centurion (Mt 8:5)
16. Peter's mother in law (Mt 8:15)
17. Two demoniacs (Mt 8:28)
18. "This man is blaspheming" (Mt 9:3)
19. Collecting tax at the tax booth (Mt 9:9)
20. Those who are sick (Mt 9:12)
21. The sinners (Mt 9: 12)
22. Jesus (Mt 9:13)
23. A leader of the synagogue (Mt 9:18)
24. "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" (Mt 9:28)
25. A demoniac who was mute (Mt 9:32)

WINNERS

St. Margret's Higher Secondary School, Shillong
First Prize:

1. Aurelia Dunai
2. Labine Khonglah
3. Evamery Ranee
4. Maffisha Khyllep

QUIZZ FOR THIS ISSUE
July 2016

1. What did Jesus ask his disciples to pray to the Lord of the harvest for?
2. Where did Jesus ask his disciples not to go?
3. According to Jesus, what would happen to those who find their life?
4. What did Jesus do after giving instructions to his twelve disciples?
5. What did John do when he heard in prison about what the Messiah was doing?
6. In Jesus 'own words, who is greater than John the Baptist?
7. When John came neither eating nor drinking, what did the people say?
8. “But I tell you, on the day of judgement it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon than for you.” Regarding which cities did Jesus say this?
9. What would Jesus give to those who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens?
10. When speaking about observing the Sabbath, what did Jesus say of David, when he and his companions were hungry?
11. When Jesus cured a demoniac who was blind and mute, what did the Pharisees say?
12. Speaking about his death and resurrection after three days what sign did Jesus give to the scribes and the Pharisees?
13. Who are Jesus' mother, sister and brothers?
14. In the parable of the sower how many kind of soil does Jesus mention?
15. In the parable of the sower, to what did Jesus compare the one who hears the word of the Kingdom but does not understand it?
16. To what is compare the one who hears the word but the cares of the world and lure of wealth choke it?
17. In the words of Jesus, which is the smallest of all seeds?
18. In the parable of the weeds, who is the one who sows the good seed?
19. Which are the three parables found in chapter 13 verses 44-50 about the kingdom?
20. Why did Jesus not do many deeds of power at Nazareth?
21. Who had arrested John the Baptist, bound him and put him in prison?
22. Why was John the Baptist arrested and put in prison?
23. Why did Herod not dare to put John to death?
24. What miracle do we find in Chapter 14 verses 22-32?
25. What did the people of Gennesaret do when they recognized Jesus?

REMEMBERING SR. VERONICA KUJUR

A Loyal and Faithful Disciple of Christ

Sr. Veronica Kujur was born on 18 August 1917, in Ujratoli village of Katkahi parish in Ranchi. She was the eldest daughter of Francis Kujur and Anna Xalxo. She had four sisters and a brother. Her parents migrated to Assam and settled down in Tezpur. She spent her time looking after the younger ones at home while her parents were at work in the fields. The catechist who visited her home one day took note of the smart little Veronica and with the consent of her parents took her to the boarding school of the Salesian Sisters in Guwahati. She was good at studies and without much difficulty procured a teaching post after the completion of her primary education.

The enthusiastic nature of young Veronica impressed Fr. Aloysius Ravalico and Fr. Joseph Dal Broi who were on their missionary tours in Assam valley. On their enquiry about her future plans she expressed her desire to become a missionary. On their return, they spoke about Veronica to Bishop Ferrando and to the Superiors of the Salesian Sisters. Veronica was then invited to join the group of girls who were preparing themselves to begin a new Congregation of Sisters which Bishop Ferrando had planned to begin.



Veronica, along with her companions happily accepted the call of God. She was cheerful and enthusiastic; generous and willing to help everyone. Having a single aim of becoming a religious and serving the Lord in His people, Veronica and her companions longed to go out and serve the people. They knew that people outside the walls of the convent and thousands in the remote villages were waiting for them. Her sense of courage and loyalty to the Lord during her Pre-novitiate was manifested in her refusal to the proposal made by a young, handsome soldier whom she attended in the hospital during the World War II.

Veronica passed through the various stages of formation which was rather rigid and devoid even of the minimum necessities of life and made her first profession on 8 December 1944. She was one of the first touring Missionary Sisters in the villages of Assam which had its start at St. Mary's, Dibrugarh. She was filled with zeal for

souls and loved to walk through the valleys and hills, toiling day in and out, anxious to spread the Word of God and His love for all, following the footsteps of her Divine Master and her beloved Founder. She experienced poverty, hunger, and deprivation of even the basic necessities of life. But her love for Jesus, for her vocation, the missionary work and love for the Congregation helped her to undergo all these difficulties.

Touring the villages and visiting families was her greatest priority in the missions. She covered great distances on foot to interior villages in search of souls. She carried out all the responsibilities entrusted to her as best as she could.

She lived in various communities like Dibrugarh, Golaghat, Lakhimpur, Doom Dooma, Udalguri, Tetenbari, Sarupathar and finally in Jalukie. All those who had the chance of living with her acknowledge her goodness and speak of her deeds of love. She radiated the joy of the Lord to her own sisters in the community and to the people around. The sisters loved to be in her company and people in the mission field longed for her visits. She was a loving elder sister to her community members, a loving mother to the children of neighbourhood, a good companion to her sisters and was an inspiration to the people of God. Everyone who met her experienced through her the comforting presence of the Lord. No word that indicate ill feeling for others ever escaped her lips and everyone admired her qualities of mind and heart. Her outgoing and hospitable attitude attracted many to her and she made use of such opportunities to tell them about the Lord.

Sr. Veronica centred her life on God. She found joy in being with the Lord in prayer. Until the very end of her life she was found showing great interest in visiting houses and reciting the Rosary with the people in their houses.

She had always lived her life to the full and had passionate interest for carrying out the primary charism of the Congregation. She was an active missionary till the very day of her death. On 22 June 1994, she visited families in Jalukie and late in the evening accompanied the Parish Priest along with another sister for the house blessing. At 1.00 a.m. in the night on 23 June 1994, she suffered a massive heart attack and passed away.

Sr. Veronica lived beautifully 50 years of her religious life with great enthusiasm and zeal. At her demise the Congregation has lost one of its most passionate and fervent member. The members in the community where she lived feel the loss of its agile and inspirational member who had motivated them to do God's will and find peace. The families that she kept visiting feel the absence of their spiritual guide who had encouraged them to keep alive their faith in God. Certainly, Sr. Veronica has played an important role in the lives of so many persons and she has epitomised the fact that religious life is about living for God and serving the other.

Let us continue to cherish the good memories of Sr. Veronica and the legacies she left behind. May her life examples which depict clearly her thoughts for the wellbeing of the other, her commitment and simple living continue to inspire all of us.

Sr. Shiji James MSMHC



Sr. Veronica Kujur

A Loyal and Faithful Disciple of Christ



"Together let us pray to the Virgin Mary that she helps us ... to walk in faith and charity, ever trusting in the Lord's mercy; He always awaits us, loves us, has pardoned us with His Blood and pardons us every time we go to Him to ask His forgiveness. Let us trust in His mercy!"

-Pope Francis