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The Pope preaches in the Jubilee for Priests: evangelical simplicity that understands and works in the name of mercy

Vatican City, 2 June 2016 – The Jubilee for priests and seminarians – which began yesterday and concludes tomorrow, the first Friday of June, month of the Sacred Heart – today reached one of its most important moments: the retreat in the papal basilicas of Rome (St. John Lateran, St. Mary Major and St. Paul Outside-the-Walls – during which the Holy Father offered the meditations, at 10 a.m., 12 p.m. and 4 p.m., respectively. The participants in the Jubilee were able to follow all three meditations via a live connection with the Vatican Television Centre.

Before beginning the first meditation in the Basilica of St. John Lateran, the Holy Father asked the priests gathered in the Basilica to pray for each other and said that he would do the same during this day. He then went on to introduce the theme of the meditations: mercy in its various aspects.

"Mercy, seen in feminine terms, is the tender love of a mother" he said. "In masculine terms, mercy is the steadfast fidelity of a father who constantly supports, forgives and encourages his children to grow. Mercy is the fruit of a covenant; that is why God is said to remember His covenant of mercy. At the same time, it is an utterly free act of kindness and goodness rising up from the depths of our being and finding outward expression in charity. This all-embracing character means that everyone can appreciate what it means to be merciful, to feel compassion for those who suffer, sympathy for those in need, visceral indignation in the face of patent injustice and a desire to respond with loving respect by attempting to set things right. If we reflect on this natural feeling of mercy, we begin to see how God Himself can be understood in terms of this defining attribute by which Jesus wished to reveal Him to us. God's name is mercy."

"When we meditate on mercy, something special happens", explained the Holy Father. "The dynamic of the Spiritual Exercises takes on new power. Mercy helps us to see that the three ways of classical mysticism – the purgative, the illuminative and the unitive – are not successive stages that, once experienced, can then be put behind us. We never cease to be in need of renewed conversion, deeper contemplation and greater love. Nothing unites us to God more than an act of mercy. And this is not an exaggeration", he underlined, "for it is by mercy that the Lord forgives our sins and gives us the grace to practise acts of mercy in His name. Nothing strengthens our faith more than being cleansed of our sins. Nothing can be clearer than ... the Beatitude, 'Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy', for our understanding of God's will and the mission He has entrusted to us."

"We can apply to mercy the Lord's statement that 'the measure you give will be the measure you receive'", continued Francis, adding that when he hears this phrase he thinks of those impatient confessors, who punish

and reproach the penitent, who will be treated in the same way by God when their time comes.

"Mercy makes us pass from the recognition that we have received mercy to a desire to show mercy to others. We can feel within us a healthy tension between sorrow for our sins and the dignity that the Lord has bestowed on us. Without further ado, we can pass from estrangement to embrace, as in the parable of the prodigal son, and see how God uses our own sinfulness as the vessel of His mercy. Mercy impels us to pass from personal to the communal. We see this in the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves, a miracle born of Jesus' compassion for His people and for others. Something similar happens when we act mercifully: the bread of mercy multiplies as it is shared."

He then offered the participants in the Jubilee three suggestions for personal prayer today. The first regards two practical counsels given by St. Ignatius. "He tells us that 'it is not great knowledge that fills and satisfies the soul, but the ability to feel and savour the things of God interiorly'. St. Ignatius adds that whenever we encounter and savour something we desire, we should pray in peace, 'without being anxious to move forward as long as I am satisfied'. So too, in these meditations on mercy we can begin with what we savour most and linger there, for surely one work of mercy will lead us to others. If we start by thanking the Lord for having wondrously created us and for even more wondrously redeemed us, surely this will lead us to a sense of sorrow for our sins. If we start by feeling compassion for the poor and the outcast, surely we will come to realise that we ourselves stand in need of mercy."

His second suggestion for your prayer has to do with the way we speak about mercy. "By now you have realised that in Spanish I like to use 'mercy' as a verb: 'We have to show mercy [misericordiar] in order to 'receive mercy'. Mercy joins a human need to the heart of God, and this leads to immediate action. We cannot meditate on mercy without it turning into action. In prayer, it does not help to intellectualise things. With the help of grace, our dialogue with the Lord has to focus straight away on that sin for which I most need the Lord's mercy, the one of which I am most ashamed, the one for which I most desire to make reparation. From the outset, too, we have to speak of what most moves us, of all those faces that make us want to do something to satisfy their hunger and thirst for God, for justice, for tenderness. Mercy is contemplated in action, but in a kind of action that is all-inclusive. Mercy engages our whole being – our feelings and our spirit – and all other beings as well."

The last suggestion related to the fruit of these exercises, namely "the grace that we ask to receive ... the grace to become priests ever more ready to 'receive mercy' and to 'show mercy'". The Pope revealed that there are few things he finds more moving than the confession of a priest, because the man who confesses his own sins is the same who then confesses and forgives others.

"We can concentrate on mercy because it is what is most essential and definitive. By the stairway of mercy we can descend to the depths of our human condition – including our frailty and sin – and ascend to the heights of divine perfection: 'Be merciful (perfect) as your Father is merciful'. But always for the sake of 'reaping' even greater mercy. This fruit should also be seen in a conversion of our institutional mindset: unless our structures are vibrant and aimed at making us more open to God's mercy and more merciful to others, they can turn into something very bizarre and eventually counter-productive", he emphasised, recalling that in this respect many Church documents refer to institutional conversion and pastoral conversion.

"This retreat, then, will follow the path of that 'evangelical simplicity' which sees and does all things in the key of mercy", he concluded. "That mercy is dynamic, not so much a noun with a fixed and definite meaning, or a descriptive adjective, but rather a verb – 'to show mercy' and 'to receive mercy' – that spurs us to action in this world. Even more, it is a mercy that is 'ever greater', a mercy that grows and expands, passing from good to better and from less to more. For the model that Jesus sets before us is that of the Father, Who is ever greater and Whose infinite mercy in some sense constantly 'grows'. His mercy has no roof or walls, because it is born of His sovereign freedom."
