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General audience: mercy, path of perfection

The theme of this Extraordinary Holy Year is “Merciful like the Father”, taken from the Gospel of St. Luke: “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful”, read today before the catechesis in St. Peter’s Square. This phrase, completed with that from the Gospel of St. Matthew, in which Jesus says, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect”, provided the basis for Pope Francis’ Wednesday general audience.

In the Sermon on the Mount, which begins with the Beatitudes, the Lord teaches that perfection consists in love, the fulfilment of all the precepts of the Law. From this perspective, St. Luke shows that perfection is merciful love: being perfect means being merciful. “Effectively God is perfect”, said Francis, “but if we consider Him in this way, it becomes impossible for man to tend towards that absolute perfection. Instead, keeping Him before our eyes as merciful allows us to understand better what his perfection consists in, and drives us to be like Him, full of love, compassion and mercy”.

“But, are Jesus’ words realistic? ... If we look at the history of salvation, we see that all God’s revelation is an incessant and tireless love for humanity: God is like a father and like a mother Who loves with boundless love and Who bestows it in abundance on every creature. ... It is clear that, linked to his love that has no limit, our love will always be wanting. But when Jesus asks us to be merciful *like* the Father, He does not think of the quantity! He asks His disciples to be a sign, a channel, a witness of His mercy”.

“The Church cannot be other than the sacrament of God’s mercy in the world, in every time and towards all humanity. Think of how many saints there have been throughout the centuries who have illuminated the history of the Church! They all became merciful because they let their hearts be filled with divine mercy. They gave flesh to the love of the Love, pouring it into the many needs of suffering humanity, thus reflecting the merciful face of Christ. And Christ explains this to his disciples with two verbs: forgive and give”.

“Mercy is expressed, first of all, in forgiveness. ‘Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven’. Jesus does not intend to subvert the course of human justice, but reminds the disciples that to have fraternal relationships it is necessary to suspect judgement and condemnation. Forgiveness is indeed the pillar that supports the life of the Christian community, as in it we see the gratuity of the love with which God has loved us first. ... The Christian must forgive because he or she has been forgiven. None of us is not need God’s forgiveness. We say every day in the Lord’s Prayer, ‘Forgive us

our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us'. ... If God has forgiven me, why can I not forgive others? Am I greater than God? ... Condemning the sinner breaks the bond of fraternity with Him and diminishes the mercy of God, Who instead does not give up on any of His sons or daughters".

The second pillar is giving. "Give and it will be given to you. ... For the measure you use will be the measure you receive". "God gives far more than we deserve, but He will be all the more generous with those who have been generous on earth. ... With the measure of love that we give, we ourselves decide how we will be judged. If we look well, there is a coherent logic: in the measure from which we receive from God, we give to our brother, and in the measure in which we give to our brother, we receive from God".

"Merciful love is the only path to follow. How much we all need to be a little more merciful!" Pope Francis exclaimed at the end of his catechesis. "Do not gossip, do not judge, do not pick at others with envy and jealousy. ... We must forgive, be merciful, live our life in love. This love ensures that Jesus' disciples do not lose the identity that they have received from Him, and that they acknowledge themselves as sons and daughters of the same Father. In the love they practice in their life, may there reverberate that Mercy that will never end. But do not forget that mercy is this: forgiveness and giving. This is how we enlarge the heart: with love. Selfishness and anger diminish the heart and make it hard as stone. ... If you prefer a heart full of love, be merciful".
