

# YEAR OF MERCY THEME REFLECTION

*A God merciful and gracious,  
slow to anger,  
abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.*

Exodus 34:6

When Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio, the future Pope Francis, read the title of Cardinal Walter Kasper's new book 'Mercy' at the most recent conclave he exclaimed; '*Ah mercy! This is the name of our God*'. The title immediately resonated, as it described a God *rich in mercy* (Eph 2:4) and recognised the deep human need for people to experience it. No one is spared from difficulties, hardship, pain or suffering; and we share the desire for justice, compassion and love.

What does 'mercy' look like? Perhaps it appears as a somewhat outdated word, even a bit soft or weak. Give me the strength of 'justice' instead! Or is it both? In scripture we see that the strength of God's mercy is experienced through the passionate cry for justice for anyone in pain or suffering. It is not a *soft* love but one that demands goodness and justice to be powerfully experienced through concern, compassion and genuine openness to others. Robert Barron writes: '*God is love. Mercy is what love looks like.*'

We hear this message of mercy in parable after parable. Captured most simply yet profoundly in the story of the Good Samaritan, mercy is experienced when boundaries are crossed, when the stranger becomes known, and when the destructive unjust relationships of our world are brought back into balance. It is a story expressing the strength of mercy through courageous compassion and tenderness. It is a teaching story to help us understand something of what God's mercy looks like: it washes, cleans, heals and raises up. Mercy restores life...again and again.

Jesus' message of mercy in the parable is an encouraging one as it not only gives us a model of how to live as Christian disciples, but reminds us that mercy is offered to each one of us! It is an invitation to be open to God's mercy each day, a consolation we can then share with others (2 Cor 1:3f).

The Jubilee Year of Mercy is an invitation to open our hearts to the healing and restoring gift God offers. It is an invitation for our Marist communities to build a culture of mercy, taking up Pope Francis' challenge to make the *mercy and tenderness of God visible* through our ability to *heal wounds and warm hearts*. It is an invitation to wash, clean, heal and raise up. Life and balance is restored.

*Our desire is to be a visible and permanent memory of the loving and merciful presence of God in the midst of people: living signs of the Father's tenderness.*

*(Water from the Rock, Marist Spirituality, n.137)*

Mary, Mother of Mercy. Pray for us.

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**THIS IS THE NAME OF OUR GOD**

-POPE FRANCIS