

## The Pascal Mystery and Mercy

The greatest sign of God's mercy is Jesus Christ's total gift of himself for the salvation of the human race by his death on Calvary, and his Resurrection to new life on Easter Sunday. This Paschal Mystery shows that God did not only love the human race initially in creating us, but "also grants participation in the very life of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" (7.4). By his death, Jesus both fulfilled the demands of justice, which requires reparation for all the sins of the human race, and radically reveals God's mercy in forgiving the whole history of human offenses against his goodness.

But the mercy of God does not end either at the Cross or through our restoration to life in the Resurrection. "Christ's messianic program, the program of mercy, becomes the program of his people, the program of the Church" (8.3). The Church carries out what Mary proclaimed in her "Magnificat": that the Lord's mercy extends "from generation to generation" (Lk. 1:50). This is the subject of the sixth chapter of *Dives in Misericordia*, which (following *Gaudium et Spes*) begins by examining the hopes and problems of the present day that spring from new developments (scientific, technological, economic, etc.). Pope John Paul concludes that there is a growing sense of uneasiness and unrest in the world, and remorse over the ever-widening gap between the affluent and the poor. To meet these needs, the Holy Father says that "justice alone is not enough," and can even be destructive if not supplemented by "that deeper power, which is love" (12.3). The Church must "bear witness in her whole mission to God's mercy" (Ch. XII, Intro.), by professing it and seeking to make it incarnate. Pope John Paul II writes:

The Church lives an authentic life when she professes and proclaims mercy – the most stupendous attribute of the Creator and of the Redeemer – and when she brings people close to the sources of the Savior's mercy, of which she is the trustee and dispenser. (13.3)

These sources are "constant meditation on the Word of God and above all conscious and mature participation in the Eucharist and in the Sacrament of Penance or Reconciliation" (13.3). Drawing from these sources, both individuals and the whole Church are called to practice mercy towards others (cf. 14.1), to make mercy a lifestyle (cf. 14.2) with the crucified Christ as "the loftiest model, inspiration and encouragement" (14.3). It is through the giving and receiving of mercy that there grows a sense of equality between people whether we are giving or receiving mercy, of which we all have need. This "exchange of mercy," if it becomes widespread, has the power to bring about what Pope Paul VI first termed the "civilization of love" (14.7). We pray for this when we say "thy Kingdom come." For God's kingdom or the "civilization of love" to be realized, mercy cannot be something we extend only to the poor or to criminals or notable sinners. Rather, "merciful love is supremely indispensable between those who are closest to one another: between husbands and wives, between parents and children, between friends; and it is indispensable in education and in pastoral work" (14.6).

**The Legacy of Pope John Paul II: The Central Teaching of His 14 Encyclical Letters; Alan Schreck; Emmaus Road Publishing, Franciscan University of Steubenville, 2012; p 20**

**Reference numbers in parenthesis are from the Encyclical Letter: *Dives in Misericordia*; Pope St. John Paul II, 30 November, 1980)**