

Mercy blots out sin at the root

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning, Today we shall complete the catecheses on mercy in the Old Testament, and do so by meditating on Psalm 51[50], known as the *Miserere*. It is a penitential prayer in which the request for forgiveness is preceded by the confession of sins and in which the one praying allows himself to be purified by the Lord's love. Thus, he becomes a new creature, capable of obedience, steadfastness of spirit, and of sincere praise. The "title" that the ancient Hebrew tradition gave to this Psalm refers to King David and his sin with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite. We are quite familiar with the event. King David, called by God to shepherd the people and guide them on the paths of obedience to divine Law, betrayed his mission and, after committing adultery with Bathsheba, has her husband put to death. A terrible sin! The prophet Nathan shows David his sin and helps him to recognize it. It is the moment of reconciliation with God, in confessing his sin. Here David was humble. He showed greatness!

Those who pray with this Psalm are called to feel the same sense of remorse and of trust in God, which David felt when he mended his ways. Although the king, he humbled himself without being afraid to confess his crime and show his misery to the Lord, yet confident that the Lord's mercy was assured. What he had done was not a minor sin, a small lie: he had committed adultery and murder!

The Psalm begins with these words of supplication: "Have mercy on me, O God, / according to thy steadfast love; / according to thy abundant mercy / blot out my transgressions. / Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, / and cleanse me from my sin! (vv. 1-2). The invocation is addressed to the God of mercy in order that, moved by a love as great as that of a father or mother, he have mercy, that is, grant grace, show his favour with benevolence and understanding. It is a heartfelt plea to God, who alone can free one from sin. Very descriptive images are used: blot out, wash me, cleanse me. Made manifest in this prayer is man's true need: the only thing that we truly need in our life is that of being forgiven, freed from evil and from its consequence of death. Unfortunately, life often makes us experience these situations. In [such circumstances] we must first trust in mercy. God is greater than our sin. Let us not forget this: God is greater than our sin! "Father, I do not know how to say it. I have committed many, serious [sins]!". God is greater than all the sins we can commit. God is greater than our sin. Shall we say it together? All together: "God is greater than our sin!". Once again: "God is greater than our sin!". Once more: "God is greater than our sin!". His love is an ocean in which we can immerse ourselves without fear of being overcome: to God forgiving means giving us the certainty that he never abandons us. Whatever our heart may admonish us, he is still and always greater than everything (cf. 1 Jn 3:20), because God is greater than our sin. In this sense, whoever prays with this Psalm seeks forgiveness, confesses his sin, but in acknowledging it celebrates the justice and holiness of God. Moreover he asks to be granted grace and mercy. The Psalmist trusts in the goodness of God. He knows that divine goodness is immensely effective, because [God] creates what he says. He does not hide the sin but destroys and blots it out. He blots it out from the very root, not as they do at the dry cleaners' when we take a suit and they remove a stain. No! God blots out our sin from the very root, completely! Therefore the penitent person becomes pure again; every stain is eliminated and now he is whiter than pure snow. We are all sinners. Is this true? If any of you does not feel you are a sinner, raise your hand.... No one. We all are sinners. We sinners, with forgiveness, become new creatures, filled by the spirit and full of joy. Now a new reality begins for us: a new heart, a new spirit, a new life. We, forgiven sinners, who have received divine grace, can even teach others to sin no more. "But Father, I am weak, I fall, I fall". — "If you fall, get up! Stand up!". When a child falls, what does he do? He raises his hand to mom, to dad so they help him to get up. Let us do the same! If out of weakness you fall into sin, raise your hand: the Lord will take it and help you get up. This is the dignity of God's forgiveness! The dignity that God's forgiveness gives us is that of lifting us up, putting us back on our feet, because he created men and woman to stand on their feet. The Psalmist says: "Create in me a clean heart, O God, / and put a new and right spirit within me [...]. / Then I will teach transgressors thy ways, / and sinners will return to thee" (vv. 10, 13).\ Dear brothers and sisters, God's forgiveness is what we all need, and it is the greatest sign of his mercy. It is a gift that every forgiven sinner is called to share with every brother and sister he meets. All those whom the Lord has placed beside us, family, friends, coworkers, parishioners... everyone needs, as we do, the mercy of God. It is beautiful to be forgiven, but you too, if you want to be forgiven, forgive in turn. Forgive! May the Lord allow us, through the intercession of Mary, Mother of Mercy, to be witnesses to his forgiveness, which purifies the heart and transforms life. Thank you.

The Gospel of Mercy

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning! After reflecting on the mercy of God in the Old Testament, today we begin to meditate on how Jesus fulfilled it. It was a mercy he expressed, realized and communicated throughout his earthly life. Encountering the multitudes, proclaiming the Gospel, healing the sick, being close to the least, forgiving sinners, Jesus made visible the love that is open to us all: none excluded! Open to all without borders. A love that is pure, freely-given, absolute. A love that culminates in the Sacrifice of the Cross. Yes, the Gospel is truly the “Gospel of Mercy”, for Jesus is Mercy!

All four Gospels testify that Jesus, before taking up his ministry, *wanted to be baptized by John the Baptist* (Mt 3:13-17; Mk 1:9-11; Lk 3:21-22; Jn 1:29-34). This event gives decisive direction to Christ’s entire mission. Indeed, he did not present himself to the world in the splendor of the temple: he could have done so. He did not announce himself with the sounding of trumpets: he could have so. And he did not come vested like a judge: he could have so. Instead, after 30 years of a hidden life in Nazareth, Jesus went to the River Jordan, together with many of his people, and there waited in line with sinners. He wasn’t ashamed: he was there with everyone, with sinners, to be baptized. Therefore, from the very beginning of his ministry, he manifested himself as the Messiah who takes upon himself the human condition, moved by solidarity and compassion. As he said in the synagogue of Nazareth by identifying with the prophecy of Isaiah: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord” (Lk 4:18-19). Everything that Jesus accomplished after his baptism was the realization of that initial design: to bring to all people the saving love of God. Jesus did not bring hatred, he did not bring hostility: he brought us love! A love that saves! He made himself neighbor to the lowliest, communicating to them God’s mercy that is forgiveness, joy and new life. Jesus, the Son sent by the Father, is truly the start of the time of mercy for all humanity! Those present on the banks of the Jordan did not immediately understand the full extent of Jesus’ gesture. John the Baptist himself was stunned by his decision (cf. Mt 3:14). But not the Heavenly Father! He let his voice be heard from on high: “Thou art my beloved son, with thee I am well pleased” (Mk 1:11). In this way, the Father confirmed the path that Son has taken up as Messiah, as the Holy Spirit descended upon him in the form of a dove. Thus, Jesus’ heart beats, so to speak, in unison with the heart of the Father and of the Spirit, showing to all men that salvation is the fruit of God’s mercy.

We can contemplate even more clearly the great mystery of this love by *directing our gaze to Jesus Crucified*. As the Innocent One is about to die for us sinners, he pleads to the Father: “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Lk 23:34). It is on the Cross that Jesus presents the sin of the world to the mercy of the Father: the sin of all people, my sins, your sins, everyone’s sins. There, on the Cross, he presents them to the Father. And with the sin of the world, all our sins are wiped away. Nothing and no one is left out of this sacrificial prayer of Jesus. That means that we must not be afraid of acknowledging and confessing ourselves as sinners. How many times have we said: “Well, this one is a sinner, he did this and that...”, we judge others. And you? Every one of us ought to ask ourselves: “Yes, he is a sinner. And me?”. We are all sinners, but we are all forgiven. We all have the opportunity to receive this forgiveness which is the mercy of God. Therefore, we mustn’t be afraid to acknowledge that we are sinners, to confess that we are sinners, because every sin was borne by the Son on the Cross. When we confess it, repenting, entrusting ourselves to him, we can be certain of forgiveness. The Sacrament of Reconciliation makes present to each one of us that power of forgiveness that flows from the Cross and renews in our life the grace of mercy that Jesus purchased for us! We must not be afraid of our defects: we each have our own. The power of the love of the Crucified One knows no bounds and never runs dry. This mercy wipes away our defects.

Beloved ones, in this Jubilee Year let us ask God for the grace to experience the power of the Gospel: the Gospel of mercy that transforms, that lets us enter the heart of God, that makes us capable of forgiving and looking at the world with more goodness. If we accept the Gospel of the Crucified and Risen One, our whole life will be formed by his renewing love.