

## 2. The Quality of Mercy



### GATHERING SPACE

The quality of mercy is not strained,  
It drops as the gentle rain from heaven  
Upon the place beneath: it is twice blest;  
It blesses those that give and those who receive.  
(Adapted from Shakespeare: *The Merchant of Venice*)

Pope Francis situates a compassionate, patient and loving God at the heart of the Church of Mercy: “God is patient with us because God loves us”.  
(Pope Francis: *The Church of Mercy*)

- > How can truly believing in the reality of God’s love create a more merciful world?
- > Can you recall a time in your life when showing mercy transformed a situation or relationship?

### FROM THE SCRIPTURES

**The parable of the prodigal son and the merciful father is an archetypal story of the transforming power of mercy. Often read as a metaphor for God’s patient and eternal love for humankind, it establishes that nothing can separate us from God’s love.**

There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them. Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’ So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’

But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.

Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’ The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’

‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ (Luke 15)

### FOR REFLECTION AND SHARING

- > How do the actions of the older son mirror the tension between mercy and perceptions of justice and fairness?
- > Can you recall other Gospel stories in which mercy is given with no judgement?

## PRAYER

Patient and loving God

Be with us in this Board meeting. Help us to welcome new ideas and be open to new ways of seeing the world and its possibilities.

**For the wisdom to seek and discern the way of mercy and love**

*Ever patient God, hear our prayer*

**For the heart to welcome and forgive**

*Ever patient God hear our prayer*

**For the compassion to see and respond to those in need**

*Ever patient God, hear our prayer*

**For the commitment to work tirelessly for the good of all**

*Ever patient God, hear our prayer*

**For openness to your presence in all of our encounters**

*Ever patient God, hear our prayer*

**For courage, in this Year of Mercy, to open the doors of our hearts to change**

*Ever patient God, hear our prayer*

*(Pause for any special intentions)*

## FOR THE END OF THE MEETING

Ever loving God

May we, like the merciful father of the Gospel story:

Look for ways to embrace those who are lost, fearful or alienated

Take opportunities to celebrate and give thanks for the blessings of life

Be open to mercy, forgiveness and compassion

Act in ways that make your love a tangible reality in our world. Amen.

In the parables devoted to mercy, Jesus reveals the nature of God as that of a father who never gives up until he has forgiven the wrong and overcome rejection with compassion and mercy ... in them we find the core of the Gospel of our faith ... mercy is a force that overcomes everything, filling the heart with love ... (Pope Francis)

Illustration from Sieger Köder 'Art and Inspiration'. Bible: Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition. Pope Francis: *Misericordiae Vultus* (2015). Simmonds, G: *The Closeness of God* (2013). Pope Francis: *The Church of Mercy* (2015)

COMPASSION JUSTICE RESPECT HOPE



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