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# Mercy MOMENTS.

## *Mercy Partners*

*opening the  
door to a world  
where the  
**healing,**  
**liberating** and  
**life-giving**  
mercy of  
God is  
experienced*

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## Mercy and Justice

**Following the lead of his predecessor, Francis published *Misericordiae Vultus* on the second Sunday of Easter 2015, the Sunday proclaimed by Pope John Paul as the Sunday of Mercy.**

Francis notes, 'The temptation, on the one hand, to focus exclusively on justice made us forget that this is only the first, albeit necessary and indispensable step'. He calls us to move beyond justice to mercy, love and forgiveness. He knows that mercy is not a popular idea in present public discourse. He says that 'we must admit that the practice of mercy is waning in the wider culture. In some cases the word seems to have dropped out of use. However, without a witness to mercy, life becomes fruitless and sterile, as if sequestered in a barren desert'.

If God limited himself to only justice, He would cease to be God, and would instead be like human beings who ask merely that the law be respected. But mere justice is not enough. Experience shows that an appeal to justice alone will result in its destruction. This is why God goes beyond justice with his mercy and forgiveness. Yet this does not mean that justice should be devalued or rendered superfluous. On the contrary: anyone who makes a mistake must pay the price. However, this is just the beginning of conversion, not its end, because one begins to feel the tenderness and mercy of God. God does not deny justice. He rather envelops it and surpasses it with an even greater event in which we experience love as the foundation of true justice.

We have three options for life. We can be primarily self-interested, seeking wealth, power and honours in our own comforted isolation. Or we can live according

to the norms of justice, law, order and fairness. That way, we will always be prepared to meet the other half way, not going any further. We will be prepared to accord each their due, but not giving any more of ourselves. Or we can live with a commitment to relationships with God and our neighbour marked by mercy, forgiveness and love.

If nothing else in this jubilee year, let's address and overcome that temptation 'to focus exclusively on justice' ... Let's joyfully make those additional pilgrim steps through the door of mercy seeking and providing love and forgiveness for all who seek it. I conclude with a useful checklist which Francis elaborates when reflecting on the ever familiar Mt 25:31-45 where the king separates out those who have done the smallest thing for the least person, answering their query, 'In truth I tell you, in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers or sisters of mine, you did it to me':

We will be asked if we have helped others to escape the doubt that causes them to fall into despair and which is often a source of loneliness; if we have helped to overcome the ignorance in which millions of people live, especially children deprived of the necessary means to free them from the bonds of poverty; if we have been close to the lonely and afflicted; if we have forgiven those who have offended us and have rejected all forms of anger and hate that lead to violence; if we have had the kind of patience God shows, who is so patient with us; and if we have commended our brothers and sisters to the Lord in prayer.

Frank Brennan SJ AO, *The Year of Mercy*, 8 December 2015, Talk given at Holy Trinity Parish, Curtin, ACT, Australia

### REFLECTION

- > Why do you think that mercy is 'not a popular idea in present public discourse'?
- > How do you see the distinction between mercy and justice?