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What Does Everyday Mercy Look Like?

The publishing company I work for recently released the US edition of *The Church of Mercy* by Pope Francis. This book conveys the pope's vision for a church that could become a healing force in the world simply by communicating and demonstrating the mercy of God.

Little wonder that the word *mercy* beat in my heart for weeks and along with it the question: What does mercy look like? How might I become a person of mercy? In the Christian vocabulary, mercy is a forgiving response to wrongdoing; it is God's counter-move to our sin.

Having lived intentionally as a Christian for more than 40 years, I have avoided the easily labelled sins, acts that would require my arrest or resignation. Yet, I am a persistent sinner. When a reporter asked Francis, "Who are you?" and he answered, "I am a sinner," I knew that at least I'm in good company. Our pope has named, however, the grand antidote to sin, which is mercy ...

In a given day, I do ordinary things, and I traverse a fairly unexciting landscape. My mercy will not show up in grand gestures, and most of the time mercy reveals itself in fleeting moments ... mercy gives you his seat on the bus, acting as if he was about to get up anyway rather than making you feel that he is doing you a favour. Mercy does not let out that sigh – you know the one – the wordless disapproval toward the person in the check-out line ahead of you whose card didn't swipe, or who can't find her coupons, or whose toddler is having a meltdown. Mercy offers quiet sympathy and does not convey with her body language that this hold-up is ruining her day.

Sometimes mercy chooses not to send back the food that isn't just right, simply because the waitress looks overwhelmed.

When mercy has been wronged, the offended one does not make it difficult for the offender to apologise or ask forgiveness. In fact, mercy does not wait for the other's action but forgives so quickly that the person needing forgiveness is freer to ask for it. Likewise, at work, at home or in the classroom, mercy creates an atmosphere in which a person feels safe enough to admit his mistake or ask a question. And if mercy must correct someone, it pains her to do it, and she does so gently, without vindictive relish. Mercy makes a habit of giving others the benefit of the doubt. Mercy is not in the habit of sending deadly glares at people who are annoying. Mercy gives charitably, knowing that eventually someone will take advantage of his generosity. Mercy welcomes you, fully aware that this act may disrupt her own plans. Mercy relinquishes control when doing so allows another person to grow and learn. Mercy makes it his business to help others succeed. Mercy clears the way for others, so that they can walk on an even path, no matter how halting their steps or injured their souls.

In all these situations, mercy treats power as a sacred trust. I can be merciful because I have some sort of power, the means to affect another's life, if only for a moment. I act mercifully when I use my power to do kindness in this world ...

Thus, mercy has become my new sin detector, a personal barometer. "Am I showing mercy?" makes for self-assessment that is simple, direct, and difficult to misinterpret

Source: Vinita Hampton Wright: *National Catholic Reporter*, August 26, 2014

REFLECTION

- > As you move through this day, how will you live mercifully?
- > What words and actions will express to others around you the mercy that Pope Francis is talking about?