

NUMBER 19 29 AUGUST 2016



Mercy MOMENTS

Mercy Partners

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

www.mercypartners.org.au

The Ten Commandments of Mercy



Among the Ten Commandments, one begins with the word “remember”: “Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day”. It reminds us to recall something we already know. There are commandments of mercy written into our very DNA. We already know them, but we need to remember them more explicitly. What are they?

1. Remember that mercy lies deepest in God’s heart.

Few things so much approximate the essence of God as does mercy. Mercy is God’s essence. Scripture uses words such as loving-kindness and compassion to try to define what constitutes God’s mercy, but the central biblical concept, captured in the Hebrew concept of *hesed*, connotes a relationship that loves, embraces, and forgives even when, and especially when, we cannot measure up or deserve what’s given us.

2. Remember that mercy is the essence of all true religion.

Inside religion and spirituality, within all faiths, three things try to lay claim to what’s central: *proper religious practice, outreach to the poor, and compassion*. Ultimately they are not in opposition, but complementary pieces of one religious whole. But for religious practice and outreach to the poor to be an extension of God’s love and not of human ego, they need to be predicated upon compassion, mercy. Deepest inside of every religion is the invitation: Be compassionate, merciful, as God is compassionate.

3. Remember that we all stand forever in need of mercy.

There is more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who converts than over ninety-nine righteous persons. Does God love sinners more than the righteous? There are no righteous persons. It’s rather that we feel God’s love more when we admit that we’re sinners. None of us ever measure up. But, as St Paul so consolingly teaches, the whole point

The Ten Commandments of Mercy, continued

is that we don't have to measure up. That's what mercy means. It's undeserved, by definition.

4. Remember that, having received mercy, we must show mercy to others.

We only receive and appropriate God's mercy and the mercy of others when we extend that same mercy to others. Mercy has to flow through us. If we don't extend it to others we become self-indulgent and too harsh on others.

5. Remember that only the practice of mercy sets us free.

Receiving and giving mercy is the only thing that frees from our congenital propensity to self-seek, self-justify, and judge others. Nothing frees us more from the tyranny of ego than does the practice of mercy.

6. Remember that mercy is not opposed to justice, but is its fulfillment.

Mercy, as Walter Kasper so aptly puts it, is not "a kind of fabric softener that undermines the dogmas and commandments and abrogates the central and fundamental meaning of truth." That's the accusation the Pharisees made against Jesus. Mercy is where justice is meant to terminate.

7. Remember that only the practice of mercy will make God's Kingdom come.

Jesus promised us that someday the meek will inherit the earth, the poor will eat plentiful, rich food, and all tears will be wiped away. That can only happen when mercy replaces self-interest.

8. Remember that mercy needs too to be practiced collectively.

It is not enough for us to be merciful in our own lives. Mercy is marginalised in a society that doesn't sufficiently attend to those who are weak

or needy, just as it is marginalised in a church that is judgmental. We must create a society that is merciful and a church that is merciful. Mercy, alone, enables the survival of the weakest.

9. Remember that mercy calls us to do works both spiritual and physical.

Our Christian faith challenges us to perform mercy in a double way, corporeally and spiritually. The classic corporal works of mercy are: *Feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, shelter the homeless, clothe the naked, visit the sick, visit the imprisoned, and bury the dead.* The classic spiritual works of mercy are: *instruct the ignorant, counsel the doubtful, comfort the afflicted, admonish the sinner, forgive offences, bear wrongs patiently, and pray for the living and the dead.* God has given us different gifts and all of us are better at some of these than at others, but mercy is manifest in all of them.

10. Remember that our lives are a dialogue between God's mercy and our weaknesses.

The only thing at which we are adequate is being inadequate. We are forever falling short at something, no matter the strength of our sincerity, good intention, and willpower. Only mercy, receiving it and giving it, can lead us out of the choppy waters of our own anxieties, worry, and joylessness. Only in knowing mercy do we know gratitude.

This year, 2016, Pope Francis has asked us all to live a year of mercy, to contemplate the mystery of mercy "as a wellspring of joy, serenity, and peace." Mercy, he believes, is the secret to putting a credible face to God, to putting a credible face to our churches, and to walking with steadiness inside our own lives.

Source: Ron Rolheiser OMI, May 2016.

REFLECTION

> Do you agree with Ron Rolheister that mercy is written into our very DNA?