

Handout One



A. Pope Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*

1. **“Jesus Christ is the face of the Father’s mercy.** These words might well sum up the mystery of the Christian faith. Mercy has become living and visible in Jesus of Nazareth, reaching its culmination in him. The Father, “rich in mercy” (Eph 2:4), after having revealed his name to Moses as “a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness” (Ex 34:6), has never ceased to show, in various ways throughout history, his divine nature. In the “fullness of time” (Gal 4:4), when everything had been arranged according to his plan of salvation, he sent his only Son into the world, born of the Virgin Mary, to reveal his love for us in a definitive way. Whoever sees Jesus sees the Father (cf. Jn 14:9). Jesus of Nazareth, by his words, his actions, and his entire person^[1] reveals the mercy of God.

2. **We need constantly to contemplate the mystery of mercy.** It is a wellspring of joy, serenity, and peace. Our salvation depends on it. Mercy: the word reveals the very mystery of the Most Holy Trinity. Mercy: the ultimate and supreme act by which God comes to meet us. Mercy: the fundamental law that dwells in the heart of every person who looks sincerely into the eyes of his brothers and sisters on the path of life. Mercy: the bridge that connects God and man, opening our hearts to the hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness.

3. **At times we are called to gaze even more attentively on mercy so that we may become a more effective sign of the Father’s action in our lives.** For this reason I have proclaimed an Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy as a special time for the Church, a time when the witness of believers might grow stronger and more effective.”

... How much **I desire that the year to come will be steeped in mercy, so that we can go out to every man and woman, bringing the goodness and tenderness of God! May the balm of mercy reach everyone, both believers and those far away, as a sign that the Kingdom of God is already present in our midst! (emphasis mine)**

B. Thomas Merton, Epilogue, Sign of Jonas

The voice of God is heard in Paradise: “What was vile has become precious. What is now precious was never vile. I have always known the vile as precious: for what is vile I know not at all. What was cruel has become merciful. What is now merciful was never cruel. I have always overshadowed Jonas with my mercy and cruelty I know not at all. **Have you had sight of Me, Jonas, My child? Mercy within mercy within mercy.** I have forgiven the universe without end, because I have never known sin. What was poor has become infinite. What is infinite was never poor. I have always known poverty as infinite: riches I love not at all. Prisons within prisons within prisons. Do not lay up for yourselves ecstasies upon earth, where time and space corrupt, where the minutes break in and steal. No more lay hold on time, Jonas, My son, lest the rivers bear you away. What was fragile has become powerful. I loved what was most frail. I looked upon what was nothing. I touched what was without substance and within what was not I AM.” Thomas Merton, Epilogue, *Sign of Jona*

Thomas Merton, in Calcutta, October 1968, just a few months before his death

“The only ultimate reality is God. God lives and dwells in us. We are not justified by any action of our own, but we are called by the voice of God...to pierce through the irrelevance of our own life, while accepting that our life is totally irrelevant in order to find relevance in Him. And this relevance in Him is something that can only be received, not something we grasp or possess. It is something that can only be *received* as a gift. Consequently, the kind of life that I represent is a life that is openness to gift; a gift from God and a gift from others.”

THEME ONE: EPIPHANIES OF MERCY

A. Sacred Scripture: the Woman caught in Adultery John 7:53-8:11 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

1 While Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. 2 Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them. 3 The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, 4 they said to him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. 5 Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" 6 They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. 7 When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." 8 And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. 9 When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. 10 Jesus straightened up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" 11 She said, "No one, sir." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again."

B. Thomas Merton (see Christine M. Bouchen "Mercy within Mercy within Mercy" Presidential address ITMS Seventh General Meeting) June 7, 2001, who develops specifically the theme of mercy in Merton's writings using the three words: epiphany, transformation, and climate.

An epiphany of mercy in nature.

"And in the morning, coming down, seeing the multitude of stars above the bare branches of the wood. I was suddenly hit, as it were, with the whole package of meaning of everything: that the immense mercy of God was upon me, that the Lord in infinite kindness had looked down on me and given me this vocation out of love, and that he had always intended this, and how foolish and trivial had been all my fears and twistings and desperation." Journal Entry, December 1964 (DWL 177-78) as quoted by Bouchen, p. 4.

I am out of bed at two-fifteen in the morning, when the night is darkest and most silent...I find myself in the primordial lostness of night, solitude, forest, peace, a mind awake in the dark, looking for a light, not totally reconciled to being out of bed. A light appears, and in the light an ikon. There is now in the large darkness a small room of radiance with psalms in it. The psalms grow up silently by themselves without effort like plants in this light which is favorable to them. The plants hold themselves up on stems that have a single consistency, that of mercy, or rather great mercy. *Magna misericordia*. In the formlessness of night and silence in a word that pronounces itself: Mercy.

C. Julian of Norwich on "Mercy"

"All our life is in three: Nature, Mercy, Grace.' The high Might of the Trinity is our Father, and the deep Wisdom of the Trinity is our Mother, and the great Love of the Trinity is our Lord.".....

For the first, I understood that the high Might of the Trinity is our Father, and the deep Wisdom of the Trinity is our Mother, and the great Love of the Trinity is our Lord: and all this have we in Nature and in the making of our Substance.

And furthermore I saw that the Second Person, which is our Mother For we are double by God's making: that is to say, Substantial and Sensual. Our Substance is the higher part, which we have in our Father, God Almighty; and the Second Person of the Trinity is our Mother in Nature, in making of our Substance: in whom we are grounded and rooted. And He is our Mother in Mercy, in taking of our Sense-part. And thus our Mother is to us in diverse manners working: in whom our parts are kept undisparted. For in our Mother Christ we profit and increase, and in Mercy He reforms us and restores, and, by the virtue of His Passion and His Death and Uprising, oneth us to our Substance. Thus works our Mother in Mercy to all His children which are to Him yielding and obedient.

And Grace works with Mercy, and especially in two properties, as it was shewed: which working belongs to the Third Person, the Holy Ghost. He works rewarding and giving. Rewarding is a large giving-of-truth that the Lord doeth to him that hath travailed; and giving is a courteous working which He doeth freely of Grace, fulfilling and overpassing all that is deserved of creatures. (*I took the liberty of modernizing the English*)