

Discovering the Face of Mercy: Prospects for the Church of Hong Kong during the Jubilee Year of Mercy

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Introduction: Reading the Signs of the Times

Time and again, Pope Francis has urged the Church to read "the signs of the times." He has done so in addressing a diverse group of audiences: in his morning homilies at Domus Santa Marta, to meetings on the New Evangelization, and even to the International Theological Commission. In doing so, he has taken up a theme that came to be of great importance for the Church in the twentieth century."

The phrase "signs of the times" is of course taken from the Gospels. In the version in Matthew (16:1-4), the Pharisees and Sadducees ask Jesus for a sign from heaven. Jesus points to natural phenomena—the state of the sky in the morning and the evening—and then berates them for not being able to read signs of the weather. If they cannot read these, how will they be able to read signs from God? The only sign that can be given to this "faithless generation," he tells them, is the sign of Jonah.

As presented in the New Testament, being able to read the signs of the times meant discerning God's action in history. In the first half of the twentieth century, there was a renewed interest in reading the signs of the times. At that time it meant engaging in social analysis in order to bring a Christian response to bear upon

the needs that were being presented. It took special form in the “see-judge-act” methodology of Joseph Cardijn that became part of the praxis of the Young Catholic Worker and Young Catholic Student movements in Europe. Pope John XXIII used “signs of the times” in his first encyclical, *Pacem in terris*, as did Pope Paul VI in his first encyclical, *Ecclesiam suam*. During the Second Vatican Council, a special sub-commission on Schema XIII worked for two months in 1964 on how to include it in the pastoral constitution which was to become *Gaudium et spes*. It appeared in that document in 1965 in paragraph 4:

To carry out such a task, the Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in light of the Gospel. Thus, in language intelligible to each generation, she can respond to the perennial questions which men [and women] ask about this present life and the life to come, and about the relationship of the one to the other.¹

As I just mentioned, Pope Francis has revived interest in naming and reading the signs of the times. He sees it as a grace from God that allows us to participate more fully in God’s saving action in the world. In this presentation, I would like to follow a bit the indications that Pope Francis has been giving in reading the signs of the times, and what that means for us here in the Catholic Church of Hong Kong.

A Jubilee of Mercy

At his first celebration of the Sunday Angelus in St. Peter’s Square after his election, Pope sounded the theme that has come to characterize his pontificate up to this point: the call to experience God’s mercy. God’s infinite capacity for love and forgiveness has become a constant refrain in the Pope’s proclamation of the Gospel.²

Pope Francis began to set out his understanding of mercy in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*. He says there that at

¹ *Gaudium et spes*, 4. Official Vatican translation.

² See his Angelus message from March 17, 2013.

the very heart of being a Christian is our encounter with Jesus Christ. To experience that encounter is to experience God's mercy, which means the experience that "when everything is said and done, we are infinitely loved." He quotes there the Book of Lamentations: "the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning" (EG 6; Lam 3: 22-23).

But it is in his Bull of Indiction for the Extraordinary Year of Jubilee, *Misericordiae Vultus* ("The Face of Mercy") that he expands most clearly on his understanding of mercy. As was the case in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Jesus Christ stands as the principal revelation of God's mercy. He is the "door of mercy," that is, the way by which we come to know the Father's mercy. The Pope does not see mercy as just one more way of experiencing the presence of God, but with his predecessor Pope John Paul II, he sees mercy as revealing the central mission of Jesus Christ as sent by the Father. To quote Pope John Paul's 1982 encyclical on mercy *Dives in Misericordia*, "mercy constitutes the fundamental content of the messianic message of Christ and the constitutive power of his mission." (DM 6) Moreover, the late pope says, mercy reveals the truth about God and about ourselves. The truth about God is that mercy, unbounded loving kindness, is who God is. The truth about ourselves is that we have been created in God's image and likeness. Each human being bears in this image and likeness a dignity that we struggle to comprehend (DM 6).

Now mercy must be understood in this biblical sense, and not be restricted to its more modern, juridical meaning as an indulgence extended to wrongdoers by a judge or magistrate who foregoes the right to punish wrongful acts. It is hard for us to escape this more narrow meaning of mercy. Seen in this more restricted sense, mercy seems to be a way of bypassing the serious effects of sin. Mercy, biblically understood, does not mean indifference to evil, sin, wrongdoing, and injustice. Rather, mercy must be understood in its most biblical sense as found in the Hebrew word *hesed*, sometimes translated as "steadfast love" or "loving kindness." In the Old Testament it is considered as one of the most fundamental characteristics of God: One who is slow to anger and abounding in kindness (cf. Num 14, 18). This great love is revealed to us in

God's forgiveness of sins and wrongdoing. God, Pope Francis reminds us, never tires of forgiving us; if anything, we are the ones who tire of seeking God's mercy (EG 3).

What does it mean to live out of this great love that is God's mercy? The pope has pointed on a number of occasions to two sources of such a life: the beatitudes and the parable of the last judgment in Matthew 25.³ In the beatitudes we find the postures that should identify the Christian (indeed, the pope refers to them as "the identity card of a Christian"): being poor in spirit, that is, not so filled with worldly things as to have no place for God; being meek, so as to understand the plight of those who lack the necessities of life; hungering and thirsting for justice; being merciful, so as to grasp better the depths of God's mercy; being peacemakers; and being willing to suffer persecution for justice's sake.

The parable of the last judgment in Matthew 25 spells out in concrete steps where we are likely to encounter Christ: caring for the hungry and the thirsty, for the stranger, for the naked, for those who are sick and for those who are in prison. These sites of encounter have been enshrined in our tradition as the "corporal works of mercy." In *Misericordiae vultus* the pope notes both these and the spiritual works of mercy (MV 15), but seems to lay emphasis on the corporal works, perhaps to underscore the concreteness with which we need to encounter these sites of mercy.

What are the implications of embracing mercy as the central theme of the Gospel or, as Pope Francis describes it, the "beating heart of the Gospel"? (MV 12) Let me mention but three of them. First of all, embracing mercy requires an ongoing, even daily, encounter with Jesus Christ. Christ is "the door of mercy," Pope Francis tells us (MV 3). It is in this encounter that we experience once again the overwhelming love that is offered to us, a love that calls us to a deeper conversion to Christ. It is within this ever deepening conversion to Christ that we begin to plumb the mystery of God's mercy. We are indeed all sinners and in need of God's mercy. But it is only in grasping more fully the depth of God's mercy that we come to realize how deeply we need that mercy. It is

³ He first does so in his morning homily of June 9, 2014.

mirrored in the testimony of many saints who proclaim that they are the greatest of sinners. We may attribute such comments to hyperbole on their part, knowing what we do about their sainted lives. But what the saints are revealing is the experience of having felt keenly God's merciful hand in their lives. Growth in this appreciation of mercy comes from that continuing encounter with Christ, the face of merciful Father. In other words, we will only be effective in witnessing to God's mercy if we can mirror that mercy in our own lives and then show it to others.

Second, our witness to mercy finds its most suitable expression when it is manifested among those who have been pushed to what Pope Francis calls "the existential peripheries", the margins of existence: those who are persecuted, downtrodden, oppressed; those whose precarious existence makes them most vulnerable to the vagaries of the indifference, neglect or outright wrongdoing of others—these are the places where God's mercy is at once most manifested and most needed. To be instruments of God's mercy is to "go forth" to those peripheries. Pope Francis exemplified this by making his first trip outside of Rome not to some important city or shrine, but to the refugee camps on the island of Lampedusa in the Mediterranean. Little did any of us realize how prophetic and far-sighted this gesture would become, in light of the massive migration into Europe from Africa and the Middle East that is now shaking European societies to their foundations. But the peripheries are not always physical ones. They can be deeply existential as well. One thinks of the plight of many of the elderly among us, or of women who are immigrants and are caught between the mores of their homelands in their restriction to the private sphere of the home and the new and alien environment in which they now find themselves.

This leads to a third implication of embracing mercy. Our "going forth" as a genuinely missionary Church is our participation in the "going forth" of the Son and of the Holy Spirit into the world for the sake of redemption and reconciliation. In this mirroring of the activity of the Holy Trinity, we become most authentically who we are meant to be, created in the image and likeness of God. We become "*merciful like the father,*" which Pope Francis has called "the motto" of this Jubilee Year (MV12). Here the Pope holds up

the image of the merciful father of the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15: 11-32, but also of the Father, the First Person of the Trinity, who sends the Son and the Holy Spirit into the world for the forgiveness of sins and the transformation of all things. We are called to be, as Pope Francis puts it toward the end of *Misericordiae vultus*, “missionaries of mercy,” such that those who encounter us experience God’s mercy as “a source of liberation” (MV 18).

Mercy in Its Concreteness

Up to this point, I have been exploring the biblical and theological meaning of mercy as it has been outlined by Pope Francis. I would like to take this to a next step and speak briefly about what the characteristics of an attitude of mercy might look like in concrete situations today. Or put another way, to what signs of the times might the rich concept of mercy be responding? Let me suggest three headings that might direct our action in a ministry of mercy and a witness to God’s love in our time. This might be considered a way of reading the signs of the times for us today.

I. Generosity

The first is *generosity*. This is another way of speaking of the abiding love of God that far exceeds whatever we can imagine or hope for. Its sheer prodigality is the opposite of seeing the world through the lens of scarcity (there is only so much available to be shared) or of economic utility (anything that counts as important must be able to be measured; human beings are only important if they can produce goods and have the means to consume them). Mercy is not something to be meted out grudgingly and in ever smaller portions. Here we find the echoes of Pope Francis’ criticisms of globalization and the market economy, criticisms that have seemed harsh to some in this part of the world, but only reflect more than a century of Catholic Social Teaching. One hears this generosity too in the Pope’s call for a Church that goes out to others and is not preoccupied with guarding its own privileges. The generosity of mercy redraws the boundaries that society has set up.

Boundaries can help us define identity, but they can also become barriers to exclude people and make them outsiders. Again, Pope Francis has beautifully exemplified this redrawing of the boundaries in how he has been reaching out to the homeless in the city of Rome: eating with them, making arrangements for them to see the Sistine Chapel, even providing for a pilgrimage for them to view the Holy Shroud in Turin, and now, most recently, opening a homeless shelter within the precincts of the Vatican itself.

At the same time this generosity of mercy cannot be mindless and uncritical, bypassing as it were injustice and wrongdoing. Still one of the most challenging questions to be answered is how this generosity of mercy relates to justice, especially punitive justice. This is a difficult point that both John Paul II and Francis have noted. John Paul II addressed the question of punitive justice that becomes distorted into vengeance and cruelty in *Dives in misericordia* (M 12). Francis takes up the issue, somewhat gingerly, in *Misericordiae vultus* (MV 20f.). But one would have to say that neither pontiff gives this thorny issue the attention it deserves. Nor can I do so here, other than to say that both popes are more focused upon revealing the depths of God's mercy than on dealing with more attenuated senses of the term as presented within the contexts of Western modernity. John Paul II develops his focus in his meditation on the parable of the prodigal son, especially in attending to the focus of the father in comparison to (and in contrast with) that of the prodigal son and the older brother.

The generosity of mercy also comes into tension with forgiveness. Are there indeed unforgiveable sins? Jesus tells us in the Gospels that the only sin that cannot be forgiven is the sin against the Holy Spirit—but then does not specify just what this sin is (Mark 3:28-30). A similar question arises regarding forgiving those who have not repented. Does such forgiveness victimize the victim once again? These are questions much debated in philosophical circles as well as theological ones. As noted above, I cannot go into them further here. What both popes are trying to impress upon us, I believe, is coming to understand better the depths of God's mercy. Pope John Paul II felt that mercy was a forgotten issue of our time—one that needed to be reintroduced into

modern consciousness. Pope Francis has echoed that, to the point of making it the cornerstone of his ministry as Bishop of Rome.

Put perhaps most simply, the generosity of God that we experience in mercy is what we call “grace,” the freely given abundance of God’s love that overwhelms our hearts and transforms our lives. Pope Francis is convinced that this is the message our world needs to hear most desperately today.

II. Trustworthiness

A second aspect of mercy that is being called forth as a response to the signs of the times is *trustworthiness*. One of the characteristics of God’s mercy, sung by the Psalmist and recurring in prayers of thanksgiving, is the enduring quality of God’s mercy. “Give thanks to the Lord for he is good, his mercy endures forever,” we hear in Psalm 136. Mercy is marked not only by generosity, but by its constant character. It is reliable, trustworthy, never failing, even in the midst of the worst adversity.

In a world marked by the fleeting, ephemeral quality of much around us—shown especially in the constant obsolescence of our electronic devices—the message of boundless love that can always be counted upon provides a sure harbor in uncertain times and scenes. It is here one finds truth, in the biblical sense of the term. God is portrayed as utterly reliable and dependable, which are characteristics of truth. In the Hebrew Scriptures God does not *have* the truth; God *is* truth.

One can see the importance of this trustworthiness in the complex world of building peace. In the work of building peace, Psalm 85:11 is often quoted: “Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other.” Graciousness and faithfulness have to find one another in the fraught and often traumatized world of healing the wounds of violence and war. Graciousness is needed to build a world not dictated by vengeance. But graciousness that does not stand by the victims and fails to remember the victims’ history of suffering is not faithful to victims and the need to rebuild their trust. There must be truthfulness in remembering the past as well as a generosity that makes it possible to move beyond the past. In the Bible (and in the Old Testament

especially), “truth” is seen as something that is reliable, dependable, and trustworthy. This theme is continued in the New Testament, especially in the Gospel of John, where Jesus proclaims himself as “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6).

God’s graciousness and faithfulness are both fundamental defining attributes of who God is. That graciousness and faithfulness constitute an especially strong experience when the world is less than gracious and faithful to us. That is captured so well in Psalm 136, already mentioned, which begins: “Give thanks to the Lord for he is good, his mercy endures forever!” The litany of occasions in Israel’s past when God’s graciousness and faithfulness meant the difference between life and death shows, on the one hand, how strong that experience can be and, on the other hand, how often the poor and the marginalized must face a dangerous and inhospitable world.

Pope Francis has spoken out about what he has called “disposable people” in a “throwaway culture.” He has in mind, among others, the poor, the elderly, those with disabilities, the refugees, and those imprisoned. There is a long tradition in Christianity of practicing the corporal works of mercy. These works, that take their cue from the parable of the final judgment in Matthew 25, are as practices of mercy addressed directly to an unsafe, unreliable, and often hostile world.

Another word that comes to mind today when we think of reliability, dependability and faithfulness is “sustainability,” a concept that is linked to the risks to the environment we are now facing. Pope Francis’ encyclical *Laudato Si’* (“On Caring for Our Common Home”) has heightened our awareness of this. The encyclical is important not just as a clarion call for greater care for the environment, but also for the way it sketches out a lifestyle that bespeaks and supports genuine care for the world around us. Here we see mercy in its generous and reliable dimensions embodied and enacted for the sake of sustaining the very sources of our existence upon this planet.

III. Empathy

A third characteristic of a witness to mercy is *empathy*, the capacity to enter into the hearts and minds of others, especially those different from ourselves and those who suffer, and understand their plight, and especially how they see the world from their perspective. This capacity for empathy figures into a witness to God's mercy. In *Dives in Misericordia*, Pope John Paul II provided a long meditation on the parable of the man with two sons (or the merciful father) in Luke 15:11-32. A point that emerges in this story is how the perspective of the father about the return of the lost son is so different from that of the lost son's older brother. Empathy allows us to explore our own feelings and imagine those of others. The generosity that marks mercy allows us to enlarge our capacities to understand the experiences of others.

Empathy manifests itself also in our capacity to enter into the world of those who suffer. Something which makes that possible is a certain vulnerability on our part—a mindfulness of our own wounds as well as a capacity to enter into the wounds of others. Mercy is perhaps experienced most acutely by those who have suffered and who live with the sometimes long aftermath that comes from having suffered violence and traumatic loss. They know what it means to experience a God “who is rich in mercy” (Eph 2:4).

Living as we do in an increasingly plural world, the capacity to enter into the world of others, especially of those who are different from ourselves—and to do so with genuine receptivity and without fear—is a dimension of mercy that is certainly being called forth by the signs of the times for us today. When many people have the urge to withdraw into enclaves of the like-minded and wall themselves off from others—either by ignoring them or demonizing them—the need to reach out in hospitality and graciousness to others becomes all the more necessary. Sometimes it is a matter of learning to shift perspective. This was most evident in Europe a few months back, when the migrant flow into Europe shifted from crossing the Mediterranean from North Africa to Italy and Spain to moving up through Greece and the Balkans. Germany had earned something of an unsavory reputation as being the stern taskmaster

enforcing economies of austerity on countries in Southern Europe. As it became clearer that the stream of refugees was seeking haven in Germany, German President Joachim Gauck reminded his fellow citizens of the last great migration in Europe, one that took place in 1945. Ethnic Germans were driven out of nearly all the countries in Central and Eastern Europe where they had been at home for centuries.⁴ This was the first “ethnic cleansing” of many that were to follow. Gauck reminded his audience that one out of every four Germans had refugees in their history from the Second World War. Despite persistent xenophobic uprisings in the country, Germany transformed itself into a “*Willkommenskultur*”—a culture of welcome—almost overnight. Empathy for the stranger was quickly established. In 2015, Germany accepted one million such migrants.

Empathy is best cultivated in an atmosphere of generosity. It is sustained by reliability and an experience of trustworthiness. Empathy is a quality of mercy that needs special emphasis in a time that has been marked by political mean-spiritedness, by the lack of ability to see things from a different point of view, and by attempts to shut out people who are fleeing persecution and death. Empathy is not only an act of generosity, it is also a clear manifestation of trustworthiness. And without trust we become incapable of forming the bonds of a society in which human beings might flourish.

Much has been made of the parable of the prodigal son as exemplifying God’s mercy as we inaugurate this Jubilee Year of Mercy. There are other depictions of mercy in the Scriptures, especially in the Gospel of Luke. It is fortunate that this Jubilee Year will coincide with the Lectionary cycle’s focusing on Sundays on that Gospel. Here I might draw forth another parable from Luke that exemplifies those specific qualities of mercy of which I have been speaking here. I refer here of course to the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37).

The Samaritan was the hated outsider to the Jews of that time. Yet he is the one who shows care for the anonymous victim left in the ditch along the road. The Samaritan was a man of means, since he traveled on a draught animal rather than simply on foot as did

⁴ (Editor: Between 1945 and 1950 West Germany took in eight million refugees. Communist East Germany received four million.)

most of the population at that time. He dismounts, places the wounded man on his animal, takes him to an inn where he might be cared for, and pays all the expenses. He even promises to return in a few days to pay whatever else the victim may have required. He can expect no recompense. But here we see an exercise of generosity, a show of trustworthiness, and a moving empathy for someone who for the Samaritan was a stranger and even an enemy. Jesus presents him as the true “neighbor.” A neighbor is different from a kinsman or –woman, to whom one is bound by certain laws of reciprocity and care. A neighbor is one to whom no one owes such obligations, yet the Samaritan treats the wounded Jew he finds alongside the road as kin. In the Samaritan we find those qualities which express a life lived in the awareness of mercy—the mercy we all need at some point in our lives, and an even deeper awareness of the source of all mercy.

The Face of Mercy and the Church of Hong Kong

I turn now to the concluding part of this presentation. We are invited by Pope Francis to rediscover the face of mercy, who is Christ, the merciful face of the Father. I have tried to set forth some of the biblical and theological themes of mercy that the Pope draws upon to present his vision of a more merciful Church, a Church that goes out from itself to engage in the work of the Holy Trinity in redeeming and reconciling the world. What are we, the Church of Hong Kong, called upon to do in order to respond to the God of mercy? Let me humbly offer a few thoughts, coming as an outsider to your situation, yet awed by the challenges and possibilities that Hong Kong faces.

Hong Kong is one of the few places in the world that all agree should be called a “world city,” that is, it exemplifies as do few places on earth, the convergence of social and economic forces that are shaping the twenty-first century. The prestigious index of cities published annually by the journal *Foreign Policy* ranks Hong Kong as the fifth most “world” city on the planet. It also ranks high on the Human Development Index of the United Nations, and has the first

or second highest life expectancy index in the world. In all of these features, it shows what a city of the future can become. This is important, since the majority of the world's population now lives in large cities.

For the Catholic Church, Hong Kong's mediation of the worldwide Catholic Church with the complex situation of the Church in China represents the prospects of a new and broader version of what a truly Catholic Church might be in the future. In so doing, Hong Kong remains a beacon of hope within the worldwide communion of the Church.

At the same time, however, Hong Kong has the highest wealth inequality index of any place in the world. A center for trade and banking, the very *laissez-faire* policies that make it such an important economic centre can have unsettling social and cultural effects on its poor and on immigrants and foreign workers. In this way, it shows the rootlessness and aimlessness that globalization often brings.

And perhaps most strikingly, Hong Kong is a "place in between." Now a Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China after more than a century as a British colony, it mirrors all the polarities of the current age: between democracy and authoritarian government, among extremes of wealth and poverty, of the encounter (and clash) of people of different cultures, of the hopes and despair of the youngest generation coming of age. As it faces its being "in between," will the disparities that mark the divisions within Hong Kong be the forerunner of the breakdown of civilization? or will Hong Kong show how those differences can be bridged to include all peoples and bring forth a special kind of flourishing for the future? Can the Church of Hong Kong indeed be a "door of mercy" presenting the face of Christ in such a way as to mirror the mercy of the Father, not only for China, but for the entire world? To offer some response to those questions, I would like to return to the three headings under which I considered concrete manifestations of God's mercy, namely, generosity, trustworthiness, and empathy.

First of all, generosity. As a major center from trade and banking, it is easy for Hong Kong's general culture to become beset with the deepest shadows that accompany globalization. This can

mean that the supreme goal of all activities is to make money and gain the largest possible financial profit. All human relations get subordinated to that goal. Important goods become part of a “throwaway culture,” once their immediate usefulness has been achieved. Globalization has vision in and of itself of what constitutes a good society or a just society. It works, rather, to reproduce itself in ever greater and more comprehensive forms. People who cannot produce or consume goods are pushed to the margins. The disparity between rich and poor only becomes important if the poor threaten the livelihood of the rich.

Divine mercy is manifested in seeing infinite value in the lives of every human being. It requires what Pope John Paul II calls a “globalization of solidarity,” that is, a vision of a world city in which all can find a home, where none is left behind. The values that mark such a vision—solidarity, inclusion, community, and care, especially for those who need special attention and help—are well mapped out in Catholic Social Teaching. Pope Francis has been urging the worldwide Church to become that kind of place of welcome. He shows it in every apostolic visit he has made to different parts of the world, reaching out especially to those who otherwise appear shut out of the benefits of the contemporary world. Who are those people in Hong Kong? The poor? The domestic helpers? The homeless? The generosity of God’s grace is manifested in a Church that goes forth from itself, that becomes a “field hospital” for the suffering and wounded, that is made of up “missionary disciples,” as Pope Francis constantly reminds us.

Second, trustworthiness. In the struggle between democratic and authoritarian forms of government, one of the evils that is often manifested is how authoritarian rule tries to undermine trust among citizens. It does this by isolating and silencing those who speak the truth about human dignity and freedom, creating a culture silence about abuse and suppression of dissent. It can go further to create a culture of lies, whereby those who tell the truth are painted as unpatriotic and a cancer on society. Hong Kong struggles to maintain truthfulness as it contends with forces that would silence these voices. The Church must be a place of trustworthiness, where the truth, which comes from God, is consistently and constantly put forward. This holds in the political sphere, but also in other

dimensions of society, especially in the economic and cultural spheres as well. Trustworthiness and truthfulness go together.

Third and finally, empathy, that capacity to understand and appreciate how those different from ourselves think and feel. In increasingly pluralist societies, it becomes imperative not only to make space for others who think and feel differently (that was the goal of multiculturalism), but also to find ways that they can interact and act together, especially in promoting the common good. This is most important in world cities such as Hong Kong. Here the world's oldest continuous culture, that of China, comes together with cultural forces that have arisen in the West and now have a certain dominance in economic and social forms. Hong Kong, and the Church in Hong Kong, are called upon to show how such coming together can be done, especially in the relative compact space that makes up this great city. To the extent that it can succeed in doing so, it will be a beacon of light for all of the rest of us.

And, if I may, one final thought about how these three manifestations of mercy in this Jubilee Year might come together. Pope Francis has laid special emphasis on forgiveness as a sign, if not the sign, of the Father's mercy. A cultivation of generosity, trustworthiness and empathy make a climate of forgiveness more possible. Together, these three attitudes create a greater forbearance as we approach the shortcomings of others, as we recall how much we have needed forgiveness and mercy in our own past doings. Forgiveness is the manifestation of one of the most godly of human acts—a capacity not to let past wrongdoing restrict what the future might become. Christians believe that we can forgive because we can participate in God's forgiveness. God is the only one who has the capacity to comprehend the breadth and depth of wrongdoing, and how it might be made right. To forgive is not to forget past wrongdoing. Rather, it is to remember it in a different way—a way that does not foreclose the future, but works toward a just restoration that does not exclude the wrongdoer, but works for the transformation of the wrongdoer and the victim into a "new creation" in Christ (2 Cor 5:17).

In the celebration of an Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy, we will not come to be the perfected beings that God intends in showing forth mercy. But as we walk toward the door of mercy,

and then through the door of mercy who is Christ, we may hope to be able to confess with the words of St. John, given at the end of the prologue to that Gospel, that “we have seen his glory, the glory as of the Father’s only begotten Son, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). Full of grace (the generosity of God’s mercy) and truth (the steadfastness that can only be found in God): a true revelation of what God’s action in our time can mean for us here and now.