

The Shield Feature.....Excerpts from Pope Francis

SEGMENTS FROM THE APOSTOLIC LETTER AT THE END OF THE JUBILEE YEAR OF MERCY

MISERICORDIA ET MISERA

#2 *Forgiveness* is the most visible sign of the Father's love, which Jesus sought to reveal by his entire life. Every page of the Gospel is marked by this imperative of a love that loves to the point of

forgiveness. Even at the

last moment of his earthly life, as he was being nailed to the cross, Jesus spoke words of forgiveness: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Lk 23:34).

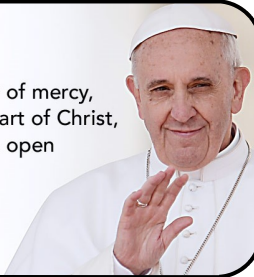
Nothing of what a repentant sinner places before God's mercy can be excluded from the embrace of his forgiveness. For this reason, none of us has the right to make forgiveness conditional.

Mercy is always a gratuitous act of our heavenly Father, an unconditional and unmerited act of love. Consequently, we cannot risk opposing the full freedom of the love with which God enters into the life of every person. Mercy is this concrete action of love that, by forgiving, transforms and changes our lives. In this way, the divine mystery of mercy is made manifest. God is merciful (cf. Ex 34:6); his mercy lasts for ever (cf. Ps 136). From generation to generation, it embraces all those who trust in him and it changes them, by bestowing a share in his very life.

#5 First, we are called to *celebrate* mercy. What great richness is present in the Church's prayer when she invokes God as the Father of mercies! In the liturgy, mercy is not only repeatedly evoked, but is truly received and experienced. From the beginning to the end of the *Eucharistic celebration*, mercy constantly appears in the dialogue between the assembly at prayer and the heart of the Father, who rejoices to bestow his merciful love. After first pleading for forgiveness with the invocation "Lord have mercy", we are immediately reassured: "May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and lead us to everlasting life". With this confidence, the community gathers in the presence of the Lord,

particularly on the holy day of the resurrection.

#8 The celebration of mercy takes place in a very particular way in the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. Here we feel the embrace of the Father, who comes forth to meet us and grant us the grace of being once more his sons and daughters.



"The true door of mercy, which is the heart of Christ, always remains open wide for us."

- Pope Francis



We are sinners and we bear the burden of contradiction between what we wish to do and what we do in fact (cf. Rom 7:14-21). Yet grace always precedes

us and takes on the face of the mercy that effects our reconciliation and pardon. God makes us understand his great love for us precisely when we recognize that we are sinners. Grace is stronger than sin: it overcomes every possible form of resistance, because love conquers all (cf. 1 Cor 13:7).

In the sacrament of Forgiveness God shows us the way to turn back to him and invites us to experience his closeness anew. This pardon can be obtained by beginning, first of all, to live in charity. The Apostle Peter tells us this when he writes that "love covers a multitude of sins" (1 Pet 4:8). Only God forgives sins, but he asks that we be ready to forgive others even as he forgives us: "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us" (Mt 6:12). How sad it is when our hearts are closed and unable to forgive! Resentment, anger and revenge gain the upper hand, making our lives miserable and blocking a joyful commitment to mercy.

#13 Another face of mercy is consolation. "Comfort, comfort my people" (Is 40:1) is the heartfelt plea that the prophet continues to make today, so that a word of hope may come to all those who experience suffering and pain. Let us never allow ourselves to be robbed of

the hope born of faith in the Risen Lord. True, we are often sorely tested, but we must never lose our certainty of the Lord's love for us. His mercy finds expression also in the closeness, affection and support that many of our brothers and sisters can offer us at times of sadness and affliction. The drying of tears is one way to break the vicious circle of solitude in which we often find ourselves trapped.

All of us need consolation because no one is spared suffering, pain and misunderstanding. How much pain can be caused by a spiteful remark born of envy, jealousy or anger! What great suffering is caused by the experience of betrayal, violence and abandonment! How much sorrow in the face of the death of a loved one! And yet God is never far from us at these moments of sadness and trouble. A reassuring word, an embrace that makes us feel understood, a caress that makes us experience love, a prayer that makes us stronger... all these things express God's closeness through the consolation offered by our brothers and sisters.

#19 Many concrete signs of mercy have been performed during this Holy Year. Communities, families and individuals have rediscovered the joy of sharing and the beauty of solidarity. But this is not enough. Our world continues to promote new forms of spiritual and material poverty that assault human dignity. For this reason, the Church must always be vigilant and ready to identify new works of mercy and to practise them with generosity and enthusiasm.

(November 20, 2016)

