

Becoming “Ministers of Mercy Above All” Through the Year of Mercy

- Introduction
 - As we prepare for the priesthood, one of the most important parts of our preparation is to receive God’s mercy so as to become rich in mercy.
 - That’s why it’s such a godsend for those in priestly formation to have this ecclesiastical holy year now, as they prepare to share lavishly that gift.
 - But like with the Parable of the Sower and the Seed, we need to soften the soil, get through the rocky subterranean limestone and take out the thorns of worldly cares and anxieties so that the graces of this year may influence your entire priesthood and bear 30, 60, or 100 fold fruit, or become another extraordinary apostle of God’s mercy like St. John Vianney, St. Leopoldo Mandic, St. John Nepomuc, St. Joseph Cafasso, St. Padre Pio.
 - What I’d like to do in this conference is focus on ten lessons we can hope to derive from this upcoming Holy Year that can help us to become more Christlike, better, more merciful priests.
- The first lesson is that we are now living at kairos of mercy
 - Pope Francis said in the interview aboard Shepherd One coming back from Brazil that the Church must follow the path of mercy and that this is a special need of our time: “The Church is a mother: she has to go out to heal those who are hurting, with mercy. If the Lord never tires of forgiving, we have no other choice than this: first of all, to care for those who are hurting. The Church is a mother, and she must travel this path of mercy. And find a form of mercy for all. When the prodigal son returned home, I don’t think his father told him: “You, sit down and listen: what did you do with the money?” No! He celebrated! ...And I believe that this is a *kairos*: this time is a kairos of mercy. But John Paul II had the first intuition of this, when he began with Faustina Kowalska, the Divine Mercy... He had something, he had intuited that this was a need in our time.”
 - The crisis of unexpiated guilt
 - In the homily he gave during the Vespers Service in which he promulgated the papal bull *Misericordiae Vultus*, he said, “Many question in their hearts: why a Jubilee of Mercy today? Simply because the Church, in this time of great historical change, is called to offer more evident signs of God’s presence and closeness. ...This is a time for the Church to rediscover the meaning of the mission entrusted to her by the Lord on the day of Easter: to be a sign and an instrument of the Father’s mercy (cf. *Jn* 20:21-23). For this reason, the Holy Year must keep alive the desire to know how to welcome the numerous signs of the tenderness which God offers to the whole world and, above all, to those who suffer, who are alone and abandoned, without hope of being pardoned or feeling the Father’s love. A Holy Year to experience strongly within ourselves the joy of having been found by Jesus, the Good Shepherd who has come in search of us because we were lost. A Jubilee to receive the warmth of his love when he bears us upon his shoulders and brings us back to the Father’s house. A year in which to be touched by the Lord Jesus and to be transformed by his mercy, so that we may become witnesses to mercy. Here, then, is the reason for the Jubilee: because this is the time for mercy. It is the favorable time to heal wounds, a time not to be weary of meeting all those who are waiting to see and to touch with their hands the signs of the closeness of God, a time to offer everyone the way of forgiveness and reconciliation.”
- The second lesson is that in response to this kairos, all of the Church’s ministers are called to be “ministers of mercy above all.”
 - In the first and most famous of his now many interviews, with Fr. Antonio Spadaro in September 2013, Pope Francis said about us as priests that “the ministers of the Church must be ministers of mercy above all.” By this he means more than merely being confessors, but he certainly does mean

that we are going to be very dedicated confessors who allow the riches of God's mercy to flow out through us into a life characterized by Christ-like compassion.

- Mercy has been the central theme of the Pontificate of Pope Francis. I'll never forget being present in St. Peter's Square for his first Angelus meditation, March 17, 2013. His beautiful words in Italian remain indelible in my memory in which he proclaimed the beauty of God's undying mercy as not only Jesus' most powerful message but the Church's most powerful continued message to the world: "Jesus has this message for us: mercy. I think – and I say it with humility – that this is the Lord's most powerful message: mercy. It was he himself who said: "I did not come for the righteous". The righteous justify themselves. Go on, then, even if you can do it, I cannot! But they believe they can. "I came for sinners" (Mk 2:17)... The Lord never tires of forgiving: never! It is we who tire of asking his forgiveness. Let us ask for the grace not to tire of asking forgiveness, because he never tires of forgiving."
- We see on Easter Sunday evening that just as God the Father sent his Son as the Lamb of God to take away the sins of the world, so Jesus was sending the apostles, and their successors, and us as their priestly collaborators to continue that saving, merciful work and Pope Francis is using his office, his words, and his example, to do everything he can to get people to receive gratefully and often this gift.
- 2 Cor 5:20: "So we are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God!"
- The third lesson is that understanding our need for God's mercy is key for us to recognize who we really are.
 - (*Conversations with Jorge Bergoglio, El Jesuita*) An authentically Christian discipleship begins our recognition that we're sinners in need of salvation and the concomitant experience that that Savior looks on us with merciful love. "For me, feeling oneself a sinner is one of the most beautiful things that can happen, if it leads to its ultimate consequences" the future Pope Francis said in "El Jesuita." At the Easter Vigil, he says, we sing "O Felix culpa," exulting in the "happy sin" that brought us to experience the love of the Redeemer. "When a person becomes conscious that he is a sinner and is saved by Jesus," Cardinal Bergoglio said, "he proclaims this truth to himself and discovers the pearl of great price, the treasure buried in the field. He discovers the greatest thing in life: that there is someone who loves him profoundly, who gave his life for him." Many Catholics have sadly not had this fundamental Christian experience. "There are people who believe the right things, who have received catechesis and accepted the Christian faith in some way, but who do not have the experience of having been saved," he lamented. He then gave a powerful metaphor of what the true experience of God's mercy is like. "It's one thing when people tell us a story about someone's risking his life to save a boy drowning in the river. It's something else when I'm the one drowning and someone gives his life to save me." That's what Christ did for us to save us from the eternal watery grave of the deluge of sin. That's what we should celebrate every day of our life, just like someone whose life has been saved by a hero would never be able to forget it, not to mention thank him enough. Unfortunately, he said, "There are people to whom you tell the story who don't see it, who don't want to see, who don't want to know what happened to that boy, or who always have escape hatches from the situation of drowning and who therefore lack the experience of who they are. I believe that only we great sinners have this grace."
 - (March 17 Homily) "Jesus has this message for us: mercy. I think – and I say it with humility – that this is the Lord's most powerful message: mercy. It was he himself who said: "I did not come for the righteous". The righteous justify themselves. Go on, then, even if you can do it, I cannot! But they believe they can. "I came for sinners" (Mk 2:17). Think of the gossip after the call of Matthew: he associates with sinners! (cf. Mk 2:16). He comes for us, when we recognize that we are sinners. But if we are like the Pharisee, before the altar, who said: I thank you Lord, that I am not like other men, and especially not like the one at the door, like that publican (cf. Lk 18:11-12), then we do not know the Lord's heart, and we will never have the joy of experiencing this mercy!
 - Mercy is essential for understanding who Pope Francis is.
 - In the Sept. 19 interview with Fr. Antonio Spadaro, when he was asked "Who is Jorge Mario Bergoglio?," he replied, "I am a sinner. This is the most accurate definition. It is not a figure of speech, a literary genre. I am a sinner... The best summary, the one that comes more from

the inside and I feel most true is this: I am a sinner whom the Lord has looked upon.” And he repeats: “I am one who is looked upon by the Lord. I always felt my motto, Miserando atque Eligendo [By Having Mercy and by Choosing Him], was very true for me. ... This is what I said when they asked me if I would accept my election as pontiff.” Then the pope whispers in Latin: “*Peccator sum, sed super misericordia et infinita patientia Domini nostri Jesu Christi confisus et in spiritu penitentiae accepto.*” I am a sinner, but I trust in the infinite mercy and patience of our Lord Jesus Christ, and I accept in a spirit of penance.”

- MV 8: The calling of Matthew is also presented within the context of mercy. Passing by the tax collector’s booth, Jesus looked intently at Matthew. It was a look full of mercy that forgave the sins of that man, a sinner and a tax collector, whom Jesus chose – against the hesitation of the disciples – to become one of the Twelve. Saint Bede the Venerable, commenting on this Gospel passage, wrote that Jesus looked upon Matthew with merciful love and chose him: miserando atque eligendo. This expression impressed me so much that I chose it for my episcopal motto
- Mercy is the fundamental story of his vocation. He said to the 200,000 in St. Peter’s Square on the Vigil of Pentecost (May 18): “One day in particular, though, was very important to me: 21 September 1953. I was almost 17. It was ‘Students’ Day,’ for us the first day of spring — for you the first day of autumn. Before going to the celebration I passed through the parish I normally attended, I found a priest that I did not know and I felt the need to go to confession. For me this was an experience of encounter: I found that someone was waiting for me. Yet I do not know what happened, I can’t remember, I do not know why that particular priest was there whom I did not know, or why I felt this desire to confess, but the truth is that someone was waiting for me. He had been waiting for me for some time. After making my confession I felt something had changed. I was not the same. I had heard something like a voice, or a call. I was convinced that I should become a priest. This experience of faith is important. We say we must seek God, go to him and ask forgiveness, but when we go, he is waiting for us, he is there first! In Spanish we have a word that explains this well: *primerear* — the Lord always gets there before us, he gets there first, he is waiting for us! To find someone waiting for you is truly a great grace. You go to him as a sinner, but he is waiting to forgive you.”
- To encounter Jesus is to encounter one who has been waiting for us to share us his mercy, it’s to meet one who calls us precisely in his merciful love, it’s to proclaim when he asks, “Who do you say that I am?,” that he is the long-awaited Messiah come to set the captives free, the Son of the Living God who is slow to anger and abounding in merciful love, to the one who awaits us with the love of the Prodigal Father to restore us to communion with him and others.
- The fourth lesson is that if we really understand Jesus, we will grasp that everything he did was to share his mercy.
 - MV 8: The mission Jesus received from the Father was that of revealing the mystery of divine love in its fullness. “God is love” (1 Jn 4:8,16), John affirms for the first and only time in all of Holy Scripture. This love has now been made visible and tangible in Jesus’ entire life. His person is nothing but love, a love given gratuitously. The relationships he forms with the people who approach him manifest something entirely unique and unrepeatable. The signs he works, especially in the face of sinners, the poor, the marginalized, the sick, and the suffering, are all meant to teach mercy. Everything in him speaks of mercy. Nothing in him is devoid of compassion.
 - (July 4, 2013 homily) The Pope based his meditation on the miracle of the healing of a paralytic (Mt 9:1-8). He reflected on the sentiments that must have shocked the crippled man when, while being carried on his bed, he heard Jesus telling him “take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven”. Those who were near Jesus and heard his words “said: ‘this man is blaspheming’; only God can forgive sins”. And Jesus, to make them understand, asked them “Which is easier, to forgive sins or to heal?”. Jesus, St Peter said, went about doing good, curing all”.
 - “But when Jesus”, the Pope continued, “healed a sick man he was not only a healer. When he taught people — let us think of the Beatitudes — he was not only a catechist, a preacher of morals. When

he remonstrated against the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and Sadducees, he was not a revolutionary who wanted to drive out the Romans. No, these things that Jesus did, healing, teaching and speaking out against hypocrisy, **were only a sign of something greater that Jesus was doing: he was forgiving sins**”.

- Reconciling the world in Christ in the name of the Father: “this is Jesus' mission. Everything else — healing, teaching, reprimands — **are only signs of that deeper miracle which is the re-creation of the world**. Thus reconciliation is the re-creation of the world; and **the most profound mission of Jesus is the redemption of all of us sinners**. And Jesus”, the Pope added, “did not do this with words, with actions or by walking on the road, no! He did it with his flesh. It is truly he, God, who becomes one of us, a man, **to heal us from within**”.
- The fifth is that sharing mercy is God’s greatest joy, and therefore God has a preferential option for those in most need of his mercy.
 - (April 7 Homily, St. John Lateran Cathedral, for Divine Mercy Sunday): The Father, with patience, love, hope and mercy, had never for a second stopped thinking about [the Prodigal Son], and as soon as he sees him still far off, he runs out to meet him and embraces him with tenderness, the tenderness of God, without a word of reproach: he has returned! And that is the joy of the Father. In that embrace for his son is all this joy: he has returned! God is always waiting for us, he never grows tired. Jesus shows us this merciful patience of God so that we can regain confidence, hope – always!
 - (Sept 15, 2013 Angelus) In the Liturgy today we read chapter 15 of the Gospel of Luke, which contains three parables of mercy: the lost sheep, the lost coin, and then the longest of them, characteristic of St Luke, the parable of the father of two sons. ... All three of these parables speak of the joy of God. ... The joy of God is forgiving, the joy of God is forgiving! ... **The whole Gospel, all of Christianity, is here!** ... Mercy is the true force that can save man and the world from the “cancer” that is sin, moral evil, spiritual evil. Only love fills the void, the negative chasms that evil opens in hearts and in history. Only love can do this, and this is God’s joy! Jesus is all mercy, Jesus is all love: he is God made man
 - MV 9: In the parables devoted to mercy, Jesus reveals the nature of God as that of a Father who never gives up until he has forgiven the wrong and overcome rejection with compassion and mercy. We know these parables well, three in particular: the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the father with two sons (cf. Lk 15:1-32). In these parables, God is always presented as full of joy, especially when he pardons. **In them we find the core of the Gospel and of our faith**, because mercy is presented as a force that overcomes everything, filling the heart with love and bringing consolation through pardon.
 - (Daily Mass, Nov 7, 2013) Indeed, the Holy Father said, God “**has a certain weakness of love for those who are furthest away, who are lost. He goes in search of them**. And how does he search? He searches to the very end. Like the shepherd who journeys into the darkness looking for his lost sheep until he finds it” or “like the woman who, when she loses her coin, lights a lamp, sweeps the house and seeks diligently until she finds it”. God, seeks out the lost because he thinks: “I will not lose this son, he is mine! And I don’t want to lose him!”. But God’s work does not consist only in seeking out the lost, Pope Francis then added. “When he finds us, when he has found the lost sheep” he neither sets it aside nor does he ask us: “Why did you get lost? Why did you fall?”. Rather, he restores what was lost to its proper place. And when this happens “it is God who rejoices. God rejoices not in the death of the sinner but rather that he be restored to life”.
 - (Aug 25, 2013 Angelus) Some of you, perhaps, might say to me: “But, Father, I am certainly excluded because I am a great sinner: I have done terrible things, I have done lots of them in my life”. No, you are not excluded! Precisely for this reason you are the favorite, because Jesus prefers sinners, always, in order to forgive them, to love them. Jesus is waiting for you to embrace you, to pardon you. Do not be afraid: he is waiting for you. Take heart, have the courage to enter through his door.
 - Lk 15: Heaven rejoices more for one repentant sinner than for 99 who never needed to repent.
- The sixth takeaway is that mercy must characterize all that the Church does because the Church is made to be a field hospital for sinners

- The reform of the Church is one in which we reshape the Church to conform fully with God's mercy, to help form each of us to be merciful as our Father is merciful, so that we may experience the happiness described in the beatitudes, "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be called children of God."
- MV 10: Mercy is the very foundation of the Church's life. All of her pastoral activity should be caught up in the tenderness she makes present to believers; nothing in her preaching and in her witness to the world can be lacking in mercy. The Church's very credibility is seen in how she shows merciful and compassionate love. ... Perhaps we have long since forgotten how to show and live the way of mercy. The temptation, on the one hand, to focus exclusively on justice made us forget that this is only the first, albeit necessary and indispensable step. But the Church needs to go beyond and strive for a higher and more important goal. On the other hand, sad to say, we must admit that the practice of mercy is waning in the wider culture. In some cases the word seems to have dropped out of use. However, without a witness to mercy, life becomes fruitless and sterile, as if sequestered in a barren desert. The time has come for the Church to take up the joyful call to mercy once more. It is time to return to the basics and to bear the weaknesses and struggles of our brothers and sisters. Mercy is the force that reawakens us to new life and instills in us the courage to look to the future with hope.
- MV 12: The Church is commissioned to announce the mercy of God, the beating heart of the Gospel, which in its own way must penetrate the heart and mind of every person. The Spouse of Christ must pattern her behavior after the Son of God who went out to everyone without exception. In the present day, as the Church is charged with the task of the new evangelization, the theme of mercy needs to be proposed again and again with new enthusiasm and renewed pastoral action. It is absolutely essential for the Church and for the credibility of her message that she herself live and testify to mercy. Her language and her gestures must transmit mercy, so as to touch the hearts of all people and inspire them once more to find the road that leads to the Father.
- (October 2, 2013 Audience). You could say to me: but the Church is made up of sinners, we see them everyday. And this is true: we are a Church of sinners; and we sinners are called to let ourselves be transformed, renewed, sanctified by God. There has been in history the temptation for some to say: the Church is only the Church of the pure, the perfectly consistent, and expels all the rest. This is not true! This is heresy! The Church, that is holy, does not reject sinners; she does not reject us all; she does not reject because she calls everyone, welcomes them, is open even to those furthest from her, she calls everyone to allow themselves to be enfolded by the mercy, the tenderness and the forgiveness of the Father, who offers everyone the possibility of meeting him, of journeying toward sanctity. "Well! Father, I am a sinner, I have tremendous sins, how can I possibly feel part of the Church? Dear brother, dear sister, this is exactly what the Lord wants, that you say to him: "Lord, here I am, with my sins". Is one of you here without sin? Anyone? No one, not one of us. We all carry our sins with us. But the Lord wants to hear us say to him: "Forgive me, help me to walk, change my heart!". And the Lord can change your heart. In the Church, the God we encounter is not a merciless judge, but like the Father in the Gospel parable. You may be like the son who left home, who sank to the depths, farthest from the Gospel. When you have the strength to say: I want to come home, you will find the door open. God will come to meet you because he is always waiting for you, God is always waiting for you, God embraces you, kisses you and celebrates. That is how the Lord is, that is how the tenderness of our Heavenly Father is. The Lord wants us to belong to a Church that knows how to open her arms and welcome everyone, that is not a house for the few, but a house for everyone, where all can be renewed, transformed, sanctified by his love, the strongest and the weakest, sinners, the indifferent, those who feel discouraged or lost. The Church offers all the possibility of following a path of holiness, that is the path of the Christian: she brings us to encounter Jesus Christ in the Sacraments, especially in Confession and in the Eucharist; she communicates the Word of God to us, she lets us live in charity, in the love of God for all. Let us ask ourselves then, will we let ourselves be sanctified? Are we a Church that calls and welcomes sinners with open arms, that gives courage and hope, or are we a Church closed in on herself? Are we a Church where the love of God dwells, where one cares for the other, where one prays for the others?

- MV 15. In this Holy Year, we look forward to the experience of opening our hearts to those living on the outermost fringes of society: fringes modern society itself creates. How many uncertain and painful situations there are in the world today! How many are the wounds borne by the flesh of those who have no voice because their cry is muffled and drowned out by the indifference of the rich! During this Jubilee, the Church will be called even more to heal these wounds, to assuage them with the oil of consolation, to bind them with mercy and cure them with solidarity and vigilant care. Let us not fall into humiliating indifference or a monotonous routine that prevents us from discovering what is new! Let us ward off destructive cynicism! Let us open our eyes and see the misery of the world, the wounds of our brothers and sisters who are denied their dignity, and let us recognize that we are compelled to heed their cry for help! May we reach out to them and support them so they can feel the warmth of our presence, our friendship, and our fraternity! May their cry become our own, and together may we break down the barriers of indifference that too often reign supreme and mask our hypocrisy and egoism! It is my burning desire that, during this Jubilee, the Christian people may reflect on the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. It will be a way to reawaken our conscience, too often grown dull in the face of poverty. And let us enter more deeply into the heart of the Gospel where the poor have a special experience of God's mercy.
- The seventh lesson is that to emphasize mercy doesn't mean that we take it for granted, as if receiving God's mercy is not needed. We must recognize how much we need it and come to get it — and not remain corrupt in our sins
 - May 17, 2013 daily homily) When Peter later remembers how he denied evening knowing Jesus, “he feels ashamed. Peter's shame.... Peter is a great man. A sinner. But the Lord shows him, him and us all, we are all sinners”. **“The problem is not sinning”, but “not repenting of the sin, not feeling ashamed of what we have done. That is the problem”.**
 - Pope Francis distinguishes on three different occasions sinners from the corrupt
 - June 3, 2013 daily homily)
 - “Three types of Christians in the Church come to mind: the sinners, the corrupt, the saints. We don't need to say too much about sinners because that is what we all are. We recognize this from within and we know what a sinner is; and, if one of us does not understand himself to be a sinner, he should visit a spiritual doctor: something is not right”. The Holy Father took time to explain the characteristics of a corrupt person, referring Gospel: God “called us with love, he protects us. Yet then he gives us freedom, he gives us all this love ‘on lease’. It's as if he were to say to us: protect and keep my love just as I safeguard you. This is the dialogue between God and us: to safeguard love. Everything begins with this love”.
 - Then, however, the tenant farmers to whom the vineyard had been entrusted “thought highly of themselves, they felt independent of God”, explained the Pontiff. In this way “they took possession of the land and forfeited their relationship with the Master of the vineyard: We ourselves are the masters! And when someone came to collect the part of the harvest that belonged to the master, they beat him, they treated him shamefully, they killed him”. This means losing the relationship with God, no longer feeling the need “for that master”. **That is what makes the “corrupt, those who were sinners like us but have gone a step further”: they are “solidified in sin and they don't feel the need for God”. Or at least they trick themselves into not perceiving it,** because “in our genetic makeup there is this relationship with God, and since they cannot deny it, they create a unique God: themselves”. These are the corrupt, and “this is also a danger for us: that we become corrupted”
 - The Bishop of Rome concluded, “The Apostle John calls the corrupt the antichrist who are among us but not of us. The word of God speaks of the saints as of a light: they are before God's throne in adoration. Let us ask the Lord for the grace to know that we are sinners — truly sinners. The grace not to become corrupt... the grace to follow the way of sanctity.”

- (Daily homily Nov 11, 2013)
 - The Pope based his homily on a passage taken from the Gospel of St Luke: “If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him; and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, and says, ‘I repent,’ you must forgive him” (cf. Lk 17:1-6). “When I read this passage,” he said, “I always see in it a portrait of Jesus.... He never tires of forgiving. And he counsels us to do the same”. Jesus’ attitude towards those who sin and sincerely repent is always one of forgiveness.
 - However, Pope Francis added, there is another passage which reads: “Woe to those by whom scandals come”. “Jesus,” he said, “is not speaking here about sin but about scandal” and he says: It would be better for him if a millstone were put around his neck and he be thrown into the sea, than that he should scandalize one of these little ones. Take heed to yourselves! The Pope therefore asked: “But what is the difference between sin and scandal?” The difference, he said, is that “whoever sins and repents asks for forgiveness, he feels weak, he sees himself as a child of God, he humbles himself and asks Jesus to save him. But the one who gives scandal and does not repent continues to sin and pretends to be a Christian”. It is as though he leads “a double life,” and he added, “the double life of a Christian causes great harm”.
 - **“This is the difference between a sinner and a man who is corrupt. One who leads a double life is corrupt, whereas one who sins would like not to sin, but he is weak or he finds himself in a condition he cannot resolve, and so he goes to the Lord and asks to be forgiven. The Lord loves such a person, he accompanies him, he remains with him. And we have to say, all of us who are here: sinner yes, corrupt no”**.
 - Those who are corrupt, Pope Francis continued, do not know what humility is. Jesus likens them to whitewashed tombs: they appear beautiful on the outside, but inside they are full of dead bones. “And a Christian who boasts of being a Christian but does not lead a Christian life is corrupt”. We all know such people, and we all know “how much harm corrupt Christians, and corrupt priests do to the Church. What harm they do to the Church! They do not live in the spirit of the Gospel, but in the spirit of worldliness. St Paul states it clearly to the Romans: Do not be conformed to this world (cf. Rom 12:2). However, it is even stronger in the original text: do not enter into this world’s schemes, into its framework, because this leads to a double life”.
 - Pope Francis concluded: **“A varnished putrefaction: this is the life of someone who is corrupt. And Jesus does not call them simply sinners. He calls them hypocrites. And yet Jesus always forgives, he never tires of forgiving. The only thing he asks is that there be no desire to lead this double life. Let us ask the Lord for the grace to flee from every form of deceit and to see ourselves as sinners. Sinners yes, corrupt no”**.
- (Daily Homily, January 14)
 - Pope Francis likened the sons of Eli to “the corrupt Christian, the corrupt layperson, the corrupt priest, the corrupt bishop. They take advantage of the situation, of the privilege of faith, of being a Christian. And their hearts become corrupt. We think of Judas: perhaps it was through jealousy and envy that he began to dip his hand into the purse” and “thus his heart began to be corrupted. John — the beloved Apostle who loved the whole world, who preached love — says of Judas: he is a thief. Full stop. It’s clear: he was corrupt. And from a corrupt heart betrayal also comes. He betrays Jesus”.
 - “Let us ask the Lord,” Pope Francis concluded, “that these two readings may help us in our Christian lives not to become corrupt like the sons of Eli; not to be lukewarm like Eli; but to be like Jesus, with that zeal to seek out people, to heal people, to love people”.

- (Daily Homily, February 13) Solomon
 - “The wisest man in the world” lost his faith this way, the Holy Father said. Solomon allowed himself to become corrupt because of “an indiscreet love, without discretion, because of his passions”. Yet, the Pope said, you might say: “But Father, Solomon did not lose his faith, he still believed in God, he could recite the Bible” from memory. To this objection the Pope replied: “having faith does not mean being able to recite the Creed: you can still recite the Creed after having lost your faith!”
 - Solomon, the Pope continued, “was a sinner in the beginning like his father David. **But then he “continued living as a sinner” and became “corrupt: his heart was corrupted by idolatry”.** His father David “was a sinner, but the Lord had forgiven all of his sins because he was humble and asked for forgiveness”. Instead, Solomon’s “vanity and passions led” him to “corruption”. For, the Pope explained, “the heart is precisely the place where you can lose your faith”.
- Referring to a passage from the Letter to the Hebrews, the Pope expressed his hope that “no evil seed will grow” in the human heart. It was “the seed of evil passions, growing in Solomon’s heart” that “led him to idolatry”. To prevent this seed from developing, Pope Francis indicated “the good counsel” that was suggested in the Gospel reading of the day: “Receive with meekness the Word that has been planted in you and it can lead you to salvation”. With this knowledge, the Pope concluded, “we follow the path of the Canaanite woman, the pagan woman, accepting the Word of God, which was planted in us and will lead us to salvation”. The Word of God is “powerful, and it will safeguard us on the path and prevent us from the destruction of corruption and all that leads to idolatry”
- The eighth lesson is that to preach and practice mercy we must seek a renewal in the Sacrament of God’s mercy and help people to become frequent penitents.
 - Pope Francis has given lots of catechises on foundation for the Sacrament and trusting in what God has done. The following is just one.
 - (Feb 19, 2014 General audience) Do not be afraid of Confession! When one is in line to go to Confession, one feels all these things, even shame, but then when one finishes Confession one leaves free, grand, beautiful, forgiven, candid, happy. This is the beauty of Confession! I would like to ask you — but don’t say it aloud, everyone respond in his heart: when was the last time you made your confession? Everyone think about it ... Two days, two weeks, two years, twenty years, forty years? Everyone count, everyone say ‘when was the last time I went to confession?’. And if much time has passed, do not lose another day. Go, the priest will be good.
 - Following his predecessors, he has stressed the importance of frequent Confession
 - Pope Francis has been calling all of us to a renewed appreciation for, and reception of, the Sacrament of Penance.
 - Nov 20 catechesis: **Priests and bishops too have to go to confession: we are all sinners. Even the Pope confesses every 15 days, because the Pope is also a sinner.** And the confessor hears what I tell him, he counsels me and forgives me, because we are all in need of this forgiveness.
 - The Church routinely has recommended to us to receive the Sacrament of Penance frequently. The Catechism of the Catholic Church says, “Without being strictly necessary, confession of everyday faults (venial sins) is nevertheless strongly recommended by the Church.” It stresses confession of venial sins because it presumes that if someone has committed a mortal sin, they would have recourse to the Sacrament without delay. But priests know that if people are not coming to the Sacrament regularly, they often wait for months to confess even mortal sins.
 - St. John Paul emphasized that we’re deceived if we think we can become holy without it. “It would be an illusion to seek after holiness, according to the vocation one has received from God, without partaking frequently of this sacrament of conversion and reconciliation,” he said in 2004. “Those who go to Confession frequently, and do so with the desire to make

progress, will notice the strides that they make in their spiritual lives.”

- Pope Paul VI described those strides: “Frequent and reverent recourse to this sacrament, even when only venial sin is in question, is of great value. Frequent Confession is not mere ritual repetition, nor is it merely a psychological exercise. Rather it is a constant effort to bring to perfection the grace of our Baptism, so that we carry about in our bodies the death of Jesus Christ who died; so that the life Jesus Christ lives may be more and more manifested in us.”
- While the Church has never officially defined how frequent someone seeking holiness should partake of the Sacrament of Mercy, it has implied that, like Pope Francis, we should be going at least every two weeks. We glimpse this in the way it handles the conditions necessary for receiving plenary indulgences, where it teaches that to receive such an indulgence, we need to have gone to confession within eight days prior or after.
- The ninth takeaway is that the practice of mercy shows who God’s real children are, because his children seek to become merciful like their heavenly father is merciful.
 - MV 9: From another parable, we cull an important teaching for our Christian lives. In reply to Peter’s question about how many times it is necessary to forgive, Jesus says: “I do not say seven times, but seventy times seventy times” (Mt 18:22). He then goes on to tell the parable of the “ruthless servant,” who, called by his master to return a huge amount, begs him on his knees for mercy. His master cancels his debt. But he then meets a fellow servant who owes him a few cents and who in turn begs on his knees for mercy, but the first servant refuses his request and throws him into jail. When the master hears of the matter, he becomes infuriated and, summoning the first servant back to him, says, “Should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?” (Mt 18:33). Jesus concludes, “So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart” (Mt 18:35). This parable contains a profound teaching for all of us. Jesus affirms that mercy is not only an action of the Father, it becomes a criterion for ascertaining who his true children are. In short, we are called to show mercy because mercy has first been shown to us. Pardoning offences becomes the clearest expression of merciful love, and for us Christians it is an imperative from which we cannot excuse ourselves. At times how hard it seems to forgive! And yet pardon is the instrument placed into our fragile hands to attain serenity of heart. To let go of anger, wrath, violence, and revenge are necessary conditions to living joyfully. Let us therefore heed the Apostle’s exhortation: “Do not let the sun go down on your anger” (Eph 4:26). Above all, let us listen to the words of Jesus who made mercy as an ideal of life and a criterion for the credibility of our faith: “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy” (Mt 5:7): the beatitude to which we should particularly aspire in this Holy Year.
- The tenth flows from the ninth: It’s the five-fold expression of Jesus’ mercy that the Church is supposed to imitate and each of us is supposed to imitate.
 - The evangelists often say that Jesus’ heart was moved with pity for the crowd. That translation softens the original Greek verb “*esplangchnisthe*”, which is a compound of the word *splanchna*, which means “viscera” or “guts” or “womb.” A more literal translation would be that Jesus was “sick to his stomach” with compassion as he saw the crowds. An even more accurate one is that his “guts were exploding” with pity. He didn’t just “feel bad” for the people who were hungry; Jesus’ compassion was like a volcanic eruption in his innards.
 - In the Gospels, this expression — *esplangchnisthe*, this explosion within Jesus’ insides — is used several times and it describes five things that Jesus, in response to these intense inner cramps of mercy, did.
 - On one occasion the Gospel tells us, “When he saw the vast crowd, his heart was moved with pity for them, for they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to *teach* them many things” (Mk 6:34).
 - The Evangelists tell us in several places that his heart was moved with pity for the multitudes “and he *cured* their sick.” (Mt 14:14; Mt 9:27; Mt 20:34, Mk 1:41; Lk 7:13).
 - In the miracle of the multiplication of loaves and fish, Jesus says in the first person “My heart is moved with pity for the crowd,” and in response he *fed* them (see also Mt 15:32).

- On multiple occasions, the Evangelists tell us his heart was moved with pity, like with the paralyzed man on the stretcher, and he *forgave* their sins. (Lk 7:13; Lk 15).
 - And when Jesus' heart was moved with pity for the crowds because they were "mangled and abandoned like sheep without a shepherd," he told his disciples, "The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few, so *pray* the Master of the Harvest to send out laborers for his harvest" (Mt 9:36) a prayer that would be answered immediately when Jesus would from among those praying disciples call 12.
 - Jesus' visceral compassion led him to teach, to heal, to feed, to forgive, and to pray for, call and send out laborers with the same compassion on the crowds.
 - Together with him, he wants us to see how many wander without direction in life and instruct them how to live by following Jesus the Way. He wants us to see how many are suffering physically, psychologically and spiritually and seek to become nurses of the Divine Physician. He wants us to notice the multitudes starving physically or spiritually and to give them the nourishment he provides through us to meet that need. He wants us to see how many are carrying around the wounds of unexpiated guilt or severed relationships and to bring them God's mercy and to God's mercy. In all of this, he wants us to become hard workers, not just bodies, in his fields and to pray insistently for other diligent laborers to join us in becoming the compassionate upset stomach of the Mystical Body. He wants us to share in this work.
 - This is what the Year of Mercy is about!
- Conclusion — Making our own Pope Francis' prayerful appeal
 - MV 25. I present, therefore, this Extraordinary Jubilee Year dedicated to living out in our daily lives the mercy that the Father constantly extends to all of us. In this Jubilee Year, let us allow God to surprise us. He never tires of throwing open the doors of his heart and repeats that he loves us and wants to share his love with us. The Church feels the urgent need to proclaim God's mercy. Her life is authentic and credible only when she becomes a convincing herald of mercy. She knows that **her primary task**, especially at a moment full of great hopes and signs of contradiction, **is to introduce everyone to the great mystery of God's mercy by contemplating the face of Christ**. The Church is called above all to be a credible witness to mercy, professing it and living it as the core of the revelation of Jesus Christ. From the heart of the Trinity, from the depths of the mystery of God, the great river of mercy wells up and overflows unceasingly. It is a spring that will never run dry, no matter how many people approach it. Every time someone is in need, he or she can approach it, because the mercy of God never ends. The profundity of the mystery surrounding it is as inexhaustible as the richness that springs up from it. In this Jubilee Year, may the Church echo the word of God that resounds strong and clear as a message and a sign of pardon, strength, aid, and love. May she never tire of extending mercy, and be ever patient in offering compassion and comfort. May the Church become the voice of every man and woman, and repeat confidently without end: "Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and your steadfast love, for they have been from of old" (Ps 25:6).