Reflections on the Year of Mercy
Learning Guide

Rev. Michael Renninger
Pastor, St. Mary Catholic Church
Richmond, Virginia
Session One

Who God Is

Jubilee Year of Mercy
December 8, 2015   Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception
November 20, 2016   Solemnity of Christ the King

Major Basilicas   St. Peter’s at the Vatican
                 St. John Lateran
                 St. Paul’s Outside the Walls
                 St. Mary Major

❖ How did a door become a symbol for the holy year?
   Pope Saint John Paul II “the holy door evokes the passage from sin to grace
   which every Christian is called to accomplish.” *Incarnationis Mysterium*

❖ Jesus said, “I am the door.” John 10:7

For Reflection

❖ Have you ever had an experience in which God, or another person, rescued
   you when you felt stuck or trapped?

❖ Is there some part of your life, right now, which feels closed off from God’s
   love and forgiveness?

❖ Is there a specific door that is important to you in your life?

❖ If so, who or what is behind that door?

“Suppose one of you has a friend to whom he goes at midnight and says, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, for a friend of mine has arrived at my house from a journey and I have nothing to offer him,’ and he replies from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door has already been locked and my children and I are already in bed. I cannot get up to give you anything.’ I tell you, if he does not get up to give him the loaves because of their friendship, he will get up to give him whatever he needs because of his persistence. ‘And I tell you, ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.’ ”

Revelation 3:20  To Laodicea.

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock.”

For Reflection

❖ How could the image from the Book of Revelation – the image of Christ persistently knocking at the door of your life – help you to pray during this holy year of mercy?

❖ What hope or encouragement is offered by the fact that God is always stronger than the obstacles and messes we’ve created?
Session Two

What Is God’s Mercy?

“I will just be here for him, and I will keep loving him.”

What IS mercy and WHO is the God who has mercy on us?

Book of Exodus, Chapter 2 & 3 – Moses’ encounter with God at Horeb

The Holy Longing, Fr. Ron Rolheiser

“YHWH...YAHWEH”    “I AM WHO AM”

Cardinal Kasper    “I am the one who is there.”
                    “I am with you.”
                    “I will accompany you.”

Mercy: The Essence of the Gospel and the Key to Christian Life
Cardinal Walter Kasper

Emmanuel    “God is with us.”
For Reflection

- The mother in the hospital revealed a self-giving faithful love. Where have you seen that kind of love in the world?
- Where have you caught a glimpse of God’s love at work in life?
- How have you experienced the truth of God’s name – the God who says, “I am the one who is there for you”?

Mercy  
Rachamim  
compassion, tenderness, mercy
Rechem  
womb

Isaiah 49:15

“Can a mother forget her infant, or be without tenderness for the child of her womb? Yet even if she forget, I will never forget you.”

Luke 7:11-16  
Raising of the Widow’s Son.

Soon afterward he journeyed to a city called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd accompanied him. As he drew near to the gate of the city, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. A large crowd from the city was with her. When the Lord saw her, he was moved with pity for her and said to her, “Do not weep.” He stepped forward and touched the coffin; at this the bearers halted, and he said, “Young man, I tell you, arise!” The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, exclaiming, “A great prophet has arisen in our midst,” and “God has visited his people.”

Greek  
“esplanchnisthe”

Hebrew  
“Hesed”

English  
Love and compassion you can “feel in your guts”
Luke 15: 8-10  The Parable of the Lost Coin.

“Or what woman having ten coins and losing one would not light a lamp and sweep the house, searching carefully until she finds it? And when she does find it, she calls together her friends and neighbors and says to them, ‘Rejoice with me because I have found the coin that I lost.’ In just the same way, I tell you, there will be rejoicing among the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

For Reflection

❖ Have you ever loved someone so much that you could feel it in your guts when they were suffering?
❖ How does that image help you to understand the mercy of God?
❖ Why is it important for us to remember that God's all-forgiving mercy is not something that we can earn, but is rather a gift freely given?
Session Three

How Can We Experience God’s Mercy?


“Then he said, ‘A man had two sons, and the younger son said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of your estate that should come to me.’ So the father divided the property between them. After a few days, the younger son collected all his belongings and set off to a distant country where he squandered his inheritance on a life of dissipation. When he had freely spent everything, a severe famine struck that country, and he found himself in dire need. So he hired himself out to one of the local citizens who sent him to work on his farm to tend the swine. And he longed to eat his fill of the pods on which the swine fed, but nobody gave him any. Coming to his senses he thought, ‘How many of my father’s hired workers have more than enough food to eat, but here am I, dying from hunger. I shall get up and go to my father and I shall say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as you would treat one of your hired workers.” ’ So he got up and went back to his father.

While he was still a long way off, his father caught sight of him, and was filled with compassion. He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him. His son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son.’ But his father ordered his servants, ‘Quickly bring the finest robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Take the fattened calf and slaughter it. Then let us celebrate with a feast, because this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found.’ Then the celebration began.
Now the older son had been out in the field and, on his way back, as he neared the house, he heard the sound of music and dancing. He called one of the servants and asked what this might mean. The servant said to him, ‘Your brother has returned and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’ He became angry, and when he refused to enter the house, his father came out and pleaded with him. He said to his father in reply, ‘Look, all these years I served you and not once did I disobey your orders; yet you never gave me even a young goat to feast on with my friends. But when your son returns who swallowed up your property with prostitutes, for him you slaughter the fattened calf.’

He said to him, ‘My son, you are here with me always; everything I have is yours. But now we must celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.’

**For Reflection**

- What does this parable teach me about God’s mercy?
- What might it mean if I understand that God wants me to come home?
- What does it teach us about God if we understand that God our father comes running toward us when we have been lost?

Student  “Can you prove to me that God is real?”
Student  “Do you think I will ever be able to find God?”
Teacher  “No. But I am confident that God will find you.”

**Luke 1: 50** **The Canticle of Mary.**

“God’s mercy is from age to age on those who fear him.”
Matthew 5:3-12  The Beatitudes

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted.
Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land.
Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.
Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.
Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.
Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you [falsely] because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven.
Thus they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

For Reflection

❖ How have you experienced the truth of the teacher’s statement to the student: “You will not find God, but God will find you”?

❖ In your own spiritual experience, which story or event in the life of Jesus is the most compelling example of God’s mercy?

❖ How is your understanding of God’s mercy deepened by the death and resurrection of Jesus?
God Keeps Showing up

Matthew 15: 21-28  The Canaanite Woman’s Faith.

Jesus went from that place and withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a Canaanite woman of that district came and called out, “Have pity on me, Lord, Son of David! My daughter is tormented by a demon.” But he did not say a word in answer to her. His disciples came and asked him, “Send her away, for she keeps calling out after us.” He said in reply, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” But the woman came and did him homage, saying, “Lord, help me.” He said in reply, “It is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs.” She said, “Please, Lord, for even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from the table of their masters.” Then Jesus said to her in reply, “O woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.” And her daughter was healed from that hour.

What made her faith great? I think that the greatness of her faith was revealed in these ways:

- Even though she was an outsider, even though she had been told she wasn’t part of the elite and chosen folks; she knew where to turn when she needed help. She knew that she needed the Lord Jesus.
- Once she knew that she needed Jesus, she showed up.
- Even when her original request for help was met with silence or a harsh answer, she does not give up. She does not go away.
- She did him homage. She kept asking for help. She did not leave.
- Even when others might have said, “Christ isn’t going to help you,” she did not budge.
- She kept showing up. And her prayer was answered.
For Reflection

- How did you finally learn in life that you need to turn to Jesus when you are looking for authentic help?
- What do you do when God appears to respond to your prayer with silence or with an answer you don’t want to hear?
- Have you ever been tempted to give up, or stop showing up?
- Is there someone in your life who has inspired you by their “fierce faith”?

The Eucharist is Christ’s meal of mercy.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation

Meister Eckhardt – mystical theologian

“If the only prayer you ever say is ‘thank you,’ that will be sufficient.”

How can you be reminded that God has shown up? In our household, I/we can:

- Make sure that a religious image is central in every room, or in a few key rooms. An image, like a crucifix, or icon, or statue.
- Family bible, and read from it before or after supper, or right before bed.
- Take holy water home from church. Bless self at bedtime and rising, parents make sign of cross on a child’s head as they go to sleep.
- Advent wreath, Christmas crèche…palms...
- Sacred music, books by great religious authors, e.g., Fr. James Martin’s wonderful book, Jesus: A Pilgrimage.
- At your parish, keep showing up... religious formation, prayer and liturgy, service and outreach. The more you participate and show up, the more it will feel like home!
Dorothy Day, founder of the *Catholic Worker* movement

Why do you leave your work in order to go to daily mass? Couldn't you do more good in your ministry?

Dorothy Day

Well, going to daily Mass is like the simple kiss that a husband and wife give to each other every morning. Every day, it’s the same thing – a simple kiss, given quickly. Sometimes, without thinking much about it. But they do it, every day. And they keep doing it. But every once in a while, the simple kiss slows down; and, quite by surprise, that ordinary daily kiss blossoms into a deeper, more passionate moment of love and joy. But you can’t experience that profound moment of love and joy unless you show up for the ordinary kiss that is repeated every day.

That’s why Dorothy Day showed up for daily mass and daily prayer...she knew, that the kiss would slow down, and God’s mercy would fill her soul.

**For Reflection**

- Have you ever stopped showing up for church or for prayer? What brought you back?
- Have you ever had an experience of God’s mercy in the celebration of the Eucharist or some other sacrament?
- What is one specific thing you will try to do during the year of mercy to open your heart to the love of Christ?
Session Five

Become the Mercy of Christ


Jesus said, “A man fell victim to robbers as he went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. They stripped him and beat him and went off leaving him half-dead. A priest happened to be going down that road, but when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. Likewise a Levite came to the place, and when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. But a Samaritan traveler who came upon him was moved with compassion at the sight. He approached the victim, poured oil and wine over his wounds and bandaged them. Then he lifted him up on his own animal, took him to an inn and cared for him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper with the instruction, ‘Take care of him.’ Then Jesus asked, ‘If you spend more than what I have given you, I shall repay you on my way back.’ Which of these three, in your opinion, was neighbor to the robbers’ victim?” The man answered, “The one who treated him with mercy,’ and Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

Latin:  Misericordia  Mercy
         cor  heart
         miser  of the poor or for the poor/suffering
      Mercy/Misericordia  someone who has a heart for the poor and for the poor and suffering
For Reflection

❖ When have you had an opportunity to share God’s mercy with someone else? How did that experience enrich your life?

❖ Who are the people in your daily experience who need to experience God’s mercy?

❖ What are you willing to do to share that mercy with them?

❖ What can your parish do in this year of mercy to share the gift of Christ’s mercy with those who feel ignored or unnoticed?
Priests get some of the best phone calls!

**Luke 18: 9-14  The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector.**

Jesus then addressed this parable to those who were convinced of their own righteousness and despised everyone else. Jesus said, “Two people went up to the temple area to pray; one was a Pharisee and the other was a tax collector. The Pharisee took up his position and spoke this prayer to himself, ‘O God, I thank you that I am not like the rest of humanity—greedy, dishonest, adulterous—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, and I pay tithes on my whole income.’ But the tax collector stood off at a distance and would not even raise his eyes to heaven but beat his breast and prayed, ‘O God, be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, the latter went home justified, not the former; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted.’”

Pope Francis  “The Eucharist is not a reward for the perfect, but rather it is a medicine for those who are weak.”   Cf. Evangelii Gaudium

Professor  “The role of a prophet is to comfort the afflicted and to afflict the comfortable.”

Pope Francis: Untying the Knots Paul Vallely

Image of  *Mary, The Untier of Knots*  
Johann Georg Melchior Schmittner, 1700

Mary, Untier of Knots or Mary, Undoer of Knots is the name of both a Marian devotion and a Baroque painting which represents that devotion.
# Notes
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Edward Knippers
email: ecknippers@aol.com
http://www.edwardknippers.com

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Videography and Editing
Hal McArthur
(804) 230-7135

McArthur Communications, Inc.

Learning Guide Design
Linda Macdonald
email: lmacdonald@b2bsol.com
http://www.b2bsol.com
Prayer of Pope Francis for the Jubilee

Lord Jesus Christ,
you have taught us to be merciful like the heavenly Father,
and have told us that whoever sees you sees Him.
Show us your face and we will be saved.
Your loving gaze freed Zacchaeus and Matthew from being enslaved by money;
the adulteress and Magdalene from seeking happiness only in created things;
made Peter weep after his betrayal,
and assured Paradise to the repentant thief.
Let us hear, as if addressed to each one of us, the words that you spoke to the Samaritan woman:
“If you knew the gift of God!”

You are the visible face of the invisible Father,
of the God who manifests his power above all by forgiveness and mercy:
let the Church be your visible face in the world, its Lord risen and glorified.
You willed that your ministers would also be clothed in weakness
in order that they may feel compassion for those in ignorance and error:
let everyone who approaches them feel sought after, loved, and forgiven by God.

Send your Spirit and consecrate every one of us with His anointing,
so that the Jubilee of Mercy may be a year of grace from the Lord,
and your Church, with renewed enthusiasm, may bring good news to the poor,
proclaim liberty to captives and the oppressed,
and restore sight to the blind.

We ask this of you, Lord Jesus, through the intercession of Mary, Mother of Mercy; you who live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit for ever and ever.
Amen.