

# MERCY — A REFLECTION

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

—Pope Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus* (n.1).

The American Heritage Dictionary tells us that the oldest known root of the word 'mercy' is probably the Etruscan *merc*, from which such words as 'commerce' and 'merchant' are derived. It is therefore connected with basic images of exchange—value given and received between people. The root '*merc*', through the French '*merci*' came to express the idea of grateful response and kindness of heart, and then took on the nuance of compassion and

forgiveness for those in need. This is the ultimate exchange, beautifully expressed in the Latin for 'mercy', *misericordia*: opening one's heart (*cor*) to those who are in desperate need (*miseri*).

It is a lovely thing to connect the constantly used *merci* (meaning 'thank you' in French, with the mercy that frees all faults. Just as 'goodbye' carries the prayer 'God be with you', so '*merci*' has become a polite formula expressing gratitude. Even when used without feeling or thought, even when unconsciously spoken, words have power, and '*merci*' often carries between people the courtesy that is a mark of the presence of love.

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

—Michael Fallon msc

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*O God, whose mercies are without number and whose treasure of goodness is infinite, graciously increase the faith of the people consecrated to you, that all may grasp and rightly understand by whose love they have been created, through whose Blood they have been redeemed, and by whose Spirit they have been reborn. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

—Mass of the Mercy of God.