

Mercifully Bearing Other's Burdens

Today's Gospel speaks about the burdens that are often placed on people's shoulders. As followers of Jesus, we seek to lighten the various problems and myriad difficulties people face through our concrete acts of mercy. In his first book, *The Name of God is Mercy*, Pope Francis continually insists that mercy is the very essence of God; he expresses it this way: "we can say that **mercy is God's Identity card**, God of Mercy, merciful God. For me, this really is the Lord's identity."

Although a vast amount of "mercy material" from Pope Francis is available, probably the best source is Francis' document, *Misericordiae Vultus (The Face of Mercy)*, wherein he proclaimed an entire year of mercy (2015-2016). Francis recalls how Saint John XXIII in his opening speech to Vatican II asserted that the Church wishes to use "the medicine of mercy" in proclaiming the Gospel today; she wishes to "show herself a loving mother to all: patient, kind, moved by compassion and goodness." Francis says: "We need constantly to contemplate the mystery of mercy. It is a wellspring of joy, serenity, and peace.... Mercy [is] the bridge that connects God and man" (MV 2).

Jesus' entire life and "his person is nothing but love, a love given gratuitously.... 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" (MV 8). His mercy overflows when he invites Matthew the tax collector to follow him; he looked at Matthew with merciful love and chose him: *miserando atque eligendo* [Francis' episcopal motto] (Mt 9:9). We constantly pray: "Lord Jesus Christ, you have taught us to be merciful like the heavenly Father.... Let your Church be your visible face in the world."