

Mercy: Heart of Mission

In today's Gospel, Jesus tells a parable about a barren fig tree. The servant pleads with the master to be merciful and spare the tree; the master agrees. The scene reminds this writer of the words and deeds of Pope Francis, truly a "pope of mercy." His 2015 document, *Misericordiae Vultus* [MV] (*The Face of Mercy*) proclaimed an entire year of mercy. 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" (2). We listen to some additional words that express the pope's profound vision!

Scripture clearly affirms that God is "the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation" (2 Cor 1:3). Our God is "rich in mercy" (Eph 2:4). In Jesus of Nazareth, mercy has become living and visible. 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" (8).

"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" (10). "The Church is commissioned to announce the mercy of God, the beating heart of the Gospel.... Wherever there are Christians, everyone should find an oasis of mercy" (12).

Mission means "living-in-mercy." Here are some suggestions to translate mercy into concrete deeds. Mercy addresses various types of human suffering; Christians are called to practice the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. Mercy is challenging; its demands are often inconvenient and unpredictable. Practicing mercy must spring from God's love in our hearts (Rm 5:5); it is not only giving things, but giving ourselves. Pray that you may imitate the same merciful love that Jesus—and Mary—consistently manifest.