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DIVINE MERCY AND JUSTICE
by Raymond Leo Cardinal Burke

Pope Francis has recently published a book-length interview which is being distributed in six languages in more than 80 countries with the title: *The Name of God Is Mercy*.¹ This publication and its wide distribution manifests how divine mercy is a central subject of discussion in the Church today. The centrality of divine mercy is certainly not new in the Church's teaching and pastoral practice, even though some today would give the impression that it is so. At the same time, the current widespread discussion of mercy risks making it a slogan lacking a profound understanding of its meaning in the Church's constant teaching. Sadly, for example, one hears of various difficult situations in the Church today rather easily dismissed by invoking God's mercy.

It is therefore important that we take up a serious consideration of the nature of God's mercy as He has revealed it to us and as it has been taught in the Magisterium. To assist such reflection, I will concentrate my attention on the teaching in the Sacred Scripture as it has been interpreted by Saint Thomas Aquinas and Pope Saint John Paul II. Then, I will relate that teaching to the natural moral law.

Preliminary Observations

Before entering into the heart of the matter, I make some preliminary observations. My first preliminary observation is that the word, "mercy," together with several other words, like "*pastoral*," "*listening*," "*discernment*," "*accompaniment*," and "*integration*" have, in these years, become talismanic in the Church, that is, they have taken on a kind of magical quality which risks becoming an ideology replacing what is irreplaceable for us: the constant doctrine and discipline of the Church. The phenomenon in question has been studied in some depth by the Italian scholar, Guido Vignelli, as it manifested itself in a striking manner during the preparation and celebration of the last two sessions of the Synod of Bishops, dedicated to marriage and the family. The results of his study thus far are published in a small volume of which there should soon be an English translation.²

For instance, *pastoral* care is now regularly contrasted with concern for the doctrine which must be its foundation. The concern for doctrine and discipline is characterized as pharisaical, as wishing to respond coldly or even violently to the faithful who find themselves in an irregular situation morally. In a similar manner, *discernment*, *listening* and *accompaniment* are divorced from their necessary foundation in the truth, in objective reality. Likewise, *integration* is divorced from communion which is the only foundation of participation in the life of Christ in the Church.

All of these terms are used in a worldly or political sense, guided by a view of nature and reality which is constantly changing. The perspective of eternal life is eclipsed in favor of a kind of popular view of the Church in which all should feel "at home," even if their daily living is an open contradiction to the truth and love of Christ. In any case, the use of any of these terms must be firmly grounded in the truth, together with its traditional expression, of our incorporation into

¹ Cf. Pope Francis, *The Name of God is Mercy: A conversation with Andrea Tornielli*, tr. Oonagh Stransky (London: Bluebird Books for Life, 2016).

² Cf. Guido Vignelli, *Una rivoluzione pastorale. Sei parole talismaniche nel dibattito sinodale sulla famiglia* (Roma: Tradizione Famiglia Proprietà, 2016).

Christ, into His Mystical Body, by one faith, one sacramental life, and one discipline or governance.

One of the more disturbing manifestations of the ideological use of these terms ends up by proclaiming that all men and women, no matter what their religion, are children of God, and that all are guided by divine love. The truth is that a man or woman can only become a child of God in God the Son Incarnate, that is, through the Sacrament of Baptism. All men and women are created in the image and likeness of God, but they have been alienated from God by Original Sin. Hence, the need of rebirth in Christ through the Sacrament of Baptism. At the same time, the gift of divine love only comes into our hearts from the glorious pierced Heart of Jesus. To think and speak otherwise is to deny that Jesus Christ alone is Lord, that Jesus Christ alone saves us from sin and wins for us eternal life.

My second observation has to do with our duty as members of the Church Militant to serve Christ and His Mystical Body, the Church, in two ways: the defense of the faith and the care of our neighbor in need. For the defense of the faith, we must know the faith profoundly and practice it with integrity. Clearly, key to the faith is our belief in God's mercy, when we have repented of our sins and seek to be reconciled with Him and with one another. Belief in divine mercy, as we shall reflect, is part of belief in the immeasurable and unceasing love of God, which is represented for us by the Divine Heart and, after the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ, by His Most Sacred Heart.

The covenant of love, which God has formed with us from the time of our First Parents and which He has brought to fullness by the Redemptive Incarnation of His only-begotten Son, is the source of our care for the poor. We are not social workers. We are not do-gooders. We are soldiers of Christ who, by the very nature of being incorporated into the Body of Christ, express our holy militancy by bringing the love of God to the poor whom we serve. The Encyclical Letter of Pope Saint John Paul II, *Dives in Misericordia*, and the Encyclical Letters of Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* and *Caritas in Veritate*, express the

profound truth of our care of the poor. Yes, we address their poverty, whether it be serious illness, homelessness, material poverty, or any other form of human misery, but, first, we address their deepest need: to know the love of God in Our Lord Jesus Christ. Our charity is always defined by our life in Christ Who inspires and strengthens us to bring the Father's love to every neighbor and especially the neighbor who is in most need.

It must always be clear, for example, that, in our care for the poor, we respect absolutely the moral law. In today's highly secularized world, pressure is often exerted upon works of charity to engage in immoral practices which are somehow seen to be a ready answer to one or another form of suffering. For us, charity can never contradict the truth. What is morally evil can never serve the good of the one for whom we care, even if it may seem to offer some immediate help or remedy.

Regarding the care of the poor who are not Christian, we do not engage in proselytism, that is, in practices to induce or force another into embracing the Christian faith. But it must be clear to our non-Christian brethren that our love of them has a source other than ourselves, namely, that our love of them is Christian: it comes from our communion of love with God the Father in God the Son through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Pope Benedict XVI takes up this question in his Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est*.³

My third preliminary observation regards the Jubilee Year of Mercy. First of all, we must be conscious that technically the Year of Mercy is not a jubilee, in the way in which the Church has always understood the devotion. In the Old Testament a jubilee was celebrated every 7 years or at other intervals. It was always, as it is today, a time to set things right in life, to correct injustices and to exercise more strongly the bond of love with neighbor which is inherent to the bond of love with God. Since the Redemptive Incarnation, the jubilee year always marks a 25-year anniversary of either

³ Cf. Benedictus PP. XVI, Litterae Encyclicae *Deus Caritas Est*, "De christiano amore," 25 Decembris 2005, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 98 (2006) 245, n. 31. [DC].

the Birth of the Lord or His Saving Passion, Death, Resurrection and Ascension. The Jubilee Year then happens in a multiple of 25 years from the Birth of Our Lord, or the year 33, the year of the Passion, Death, Resurrection and Ascension of Our Lord. Thus, we held the last jubilee year of the Birth of Our Lord in the Year 2000, and the last Jubilee of the Passion, Death, Resurrection and Ascension in 1983.

I make this point, not to be technical, but to remind us all that a jubilee year is essentially connected to the Mystery of Faith. If we lose that connection, then there is a risk, as I sometimes detect today, to make the jubilee of mercy a kind of slogan of which the content is not well defined.

Secondly, every jubilee year is by definition a year of repentance and mercy. The Christian is invited to make pilgrimage to the holy places of our Catholic faith, principally the four major basilicas in Rome, as an expression of repentance for sin, as a work of reparation, and as a means of obtaining extraordinary grace for reconciliation and peace. Hence, the concession of special indulgences.

The symbolism of the Holy Door is essentially related to our baptism by which we entered into Christ, by which we came to life in Christ, and to Penance by which we repent of anything which has betrayed our life in Christ, express our sorrow and receive the grace of conversion and reparation. The multiplication of the Holy Door in many churches in every diocese risks the loss of the sense of a pilgrimage to the Papal Basilicas or to another designated place of pilgrimage, in order to confess our sins and to set out anew on the way of eternal life in the circumstances of our daily living.

Once again, I make these points, not to be technical, but to help us to avoid a superficial understanding of divine mercy which is not rooted in our covenantal relationship with God, which He initiated out of His totally pure and selfless love. Here, once again, we must be careful to avoid reducing divine mercy to a slogan.

Divine Mercy and Justice in the Sacred Scriptures

In our time, divine mercy is presented in many different, and sometimes contradictory, ways. Not infrequently, it is seen as opposed to divine justice. But God reveals that mercy and justice are not in conflict with each other but instead are essentially related one to the other. We read in the *Book of Psalms*, for example: “Mercy and truth have met together; justice and peace have kissed.”⁴ We see the relationship, too, in the penitential prayer of the Prophet Jeremiah:

We recognize, O LORD, our wickedness, the guilt of our fathers; that we have sinned against you. For your name’s sake spurn us not, disgrace not the throne of your glory; remember your covenant with us, and break it not.⁵

Psalm 50, known popularly by the first word of its Latin translation, *Miserere*, “Have mercy,” expresses in a most beautiful way how God’s justice makes us conscious of our sins and inspires in us sorrow for them and the firm purpose of amendment, and how God’s mercy gives us confidence to confess our sins, to beg His forgiveness, and to begin again on the just way of obedience to God’s will in all things. We cannot understand mercy without justice; we find their inseparable relationship expressed most perfectly in Christ, in the great mystery of the Redemptive Incarnation of God the Son.

Pope Benedict XVI, in his Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est*, described the whole of the Sacred Scriptures as a love story in which God “comes towards us, He seeks to win our hearts, all the way to the Last Supper, to the piercing of His Heart on the Cross, to His appearances after the Resurrection and to the great deeds by which, through the activity of the Apostles, He guided the nascent Church along its path.”⁶ In His justice, God recognizes our

⁴ Ps 85, 10.

⁵ Jer 14, 20-21.

⁶ “... nobis obviam venit, nos acquirere studet – usque ad Novissimam Cenam, usque ad Cor in cruce perforatum, usque ad Resuscitati visus magnaue opera, quibus ipse per actus Apostolorum Ecclesiae nascentis iter direxit.” DC, 230-231, n.

sin and the need of its reparation, while, in His mercy, He showers upon us the grace to repent and make reparation. In this light, one understands how Our Lord wept over Jerusalem just after His entrance into the city on Palm Sunday, as He was preparing to undergo His cruel Passion and Death within a matter of days.⁷

At Our Lord's entry into Jerusalem, the people rejoiced at His coming to them, crying out: "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"⁸ But our Lord knew the superficiality of their welcome; he knew that it would not endure. He wept, saying: "If this day [you] only knew what makes for peace"⁹ He recognized that they were lacking in turning over their hearts to God, in returning love to Him Who first loved them without measure. He knew of the injustices in which they were engaged to the harm of one another. They indeed failed to recognize what makes for peace, namely, obedience to God and His Commandments, a just and loving relationship with God and neighbor, in accord with God's law.

Through the mystery of the Redemptive Incarnation, we see in flesh and blood the unconditional love of God for us, which, in the words of Pope Benedict XVI, "is so great that it turns God against Himself, His love against His justice."¹⁰ God's justice, with its demands, remains always, but He chooses to meet those demands with His superabundant mercy. God never turns His back on us; He will never break His covenant with us, even though we are so frequently indifferent, cold and unfaithful.

We face, in our time, many questions regarding justice, including questions about human

rights, "just war," and economic inequality. What becomes clear is that the issue of justice is present in all human interactions. In that sense, we speak of justice as a social virtue. Justice is fundamentally the virtue by which we give others something, namely, the good that is owed to them. It is the virtue which establishes the right relationships necessary for happiness and peace. In Sacred Scripture, God frequently exhorts us to be just toward others: "Love justice, you that are judges of the earth";¹¹ "Give justice to the weak and the fatherless."¹² This is because God Himself is just, as all the saints in Heaven proclaim: "Great and wonderful are thy deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are thy ways, O King of the ages!"¹³

Divine Mercy and Justice according to Saint Thomas Aquinas

Having this fundamental teaching of the Sacred Scriptures before his mind, Saint Thomas Aquinas explains how justice and mercy are related and indeed united. He points out that there are two basic kinds of mercy. In some cases, mercy is mostly a feeling, as when we pity someone who is in distress. We may have heartfelt sympathy for their plight because we are united to them in some way, for example, because of our shared humanity or because of our shared faith. Or we may feel sorrow at their distress because we have endured similar evils, or we fear that such evils may also befall us.¹⁴ This is *affective mercy*.

Mercy is transformed into a virtue when it transcends feelings and is rightly ordered by reason. The virtue of mercy, Saint Thomas explains, quoting Saint Augustine, "*obeys reason, when mercy is vouchsafed in such a way that justice is safeguarded, whether we give to the needy or forgive the repentant.*"¹⁵ This is *effective mercy*. It is

17. English translation: Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est*, "On Christian Love," 25 December 2005 (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2006), p. 28, no. 17. [DCEng].

⁷ Cf. Lk 19, 41-44.

⁸ Lk 19, 38.

⁹ Lk 19, 42.

¹⁰ "Sic est is magnus ut contra se ipsum vertat Deum, eius amorem contra eius iustitiam." DC, 226, n. 10. English translation: DCEng, p. 20, no. 10.

¹¹ Wis 1, 1.

¹² Ps 82, 3.

¹³ Rev 15, 3.

¹⁴ Cf. *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 30, a. 3.

¹⁵ "... *servit rationi quando ita praebet misericordia ut iustitia conservetur: sive cum indigenti tribuitur, sive cum ignoscitur poenitenti.*" *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 30, a. 3. Cf. *De Civitate Dei*, Book 9, c. 5. English translation: St.

effective because, when mercy is properly guided by prudence, it can avoid the illusions that our emotions sometimes induce, leading to our harm and to the harm of others, and instead it can do real good in the world.

While God is eternally just, He is also merciful to the same degree. God's justice always coexists with His mercy. God acts mercifully not by contradicting His justice but by giving what is good even beyond the measure that justice requires. Indeed, God's justice always presupposes mercy and is founded upon it. Thomas explains that mercy is at the source of God's every act, for God is "rich in mercy."¹⁶ From the very beginning, it has been so, for the act of creation was not something owed to creatures out of justice; it was rather the fruit of God's loving will, and therefore a sort of mercy towards us.

According to Saint Thomas, it is above all the forgiveness of sins that manifests God's mercy. In fact, Saint Thomas maintains that forgiving men is a greater work than the creation of the world because forgiveness is more immediately directed to eternal life.¹⁷ In this way, without undermining God's justice, one can say that God's primary relation to His creation is that of mercy. Thus, in the *Nicene Creed* we profess that Christ died to save sinners, but that He will also come at the end of time to judge the living and the dead.

Divine Mercy and Justice according to Pope Saint John Paul II

We must remember that Pope Saint John Paul II has been hailed as the great pope of mercy. Thus, the then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, in the homily for the Funeral Mass of the holy Pontiff, declared: "He has interpreted for us the Paschal Mystery as a mystery of divine mercy."¹⁸

Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, tr. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1981), Vol. 3, p. 1313.

¹⁶ Eph. 2, 4.

¹⁷ Cf. *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 113, a. 9.

¹⁸ "Egli ha interpretato per noi il mistero pasquale come mistero della divina misericordia." "Missa Exsequialis," *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 97 (2005), 474. English translation:

In his early life, he suffered greatly under the Nazi and Communist regimes, experiencing intensely the evils which sin can bring upon this world. Later, as the Roman Pontiff, he nearly died from a gunshot wound delivered by a would-be assassin. Nevertheless, Pope Saint John Paul II continuously proclaimed mercy to the world, not least when he met with his assassin, Ali Agca, in his prison cell on December 27, 1983.

At the turn of the Third Christian Millennium, he recognized the heroic virtues of the modern apostle of mercy, Saint Faustina Kowalska. He beatified her on April 18, 1993, and canonized her a saint on April 30, 2000. He also instituted the Feast of Divine Mercy on the Second Sunday of Easter as a sign that Divine Mercy is a perennial and central part of Catholic Tradition. Even now from Heaven, Saint John Paul II surely calls the Church to live the virtue of mercy.

His Encyclical letter, *Dives in Misericordia* (1980), helps us to grasp his essential message. I will now summarize the Church's teaching as set forth in the Encyclical Letter. As God in the flesh, Christ reveals the Father's love and mercy toward humankind. Jesus Christ, "in a certain sense, is mercy."¹⁹ In His preaching, Christ "demanded from people that they also should be guided in their lives by love and mercy. This requirement ... constitutes the heart of the Gospel ethos."²⁰ This is expressed in Christ's promise in the Beatitudes, the summary of His entire teaching: "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."²¹

"Funeral Mass of Pope John Paul II: Friday, 8 April, Homily of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger," *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly Edition in English, 13 April 2005, p. 3.

¹⁹ "... quodammodo misericordia." Ioannes Paulus PP. II, Litterae Encyclicae *Dives in Misericordia*, "De Divina Misericordia," 30 Novembris 1980, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 72 (1980) 1180, n. 2. [DM]. English translation: Pope John Paul II, *Encyclicals* (Trivandrum, Kerala, India: Carmel International Publishing House, 2005), p.1016, no. 2. [DMEng].

²⁰ "... eadem opera ab hominibus poposcisse, ut sua in vita se insuper sinerent amore ac misericordia permoveri. Postulatum istud ... facitque etiam medullam «etheos» evangelici." DM, 1185, n. 3. English translation: DMEng, 1019, no. 3.

²¹ Mt 5, 7.

The Old Testament reveals that, “although justice is an authentic virtue in man, and in God signifies transcendent perfection, nevertheless love is ‘greater’ than justice: greater in the sense that it is primary and fundamental.”²² God’s interaction with Israel shows that love has a primacy and superiority over justice “precisely through mercy,” because God reveals that His heart is always ready to forgive the repentant sinner.²³ It follows that, “[m]ercy differs from justice, but is not in opposition to it.”²⁴

The powerful *Parable of the Prodigal Son*, related in the *Gospel of Luke*, illustrates the essence of divine mercy. Pope Saint John Paul II comments on the perennial significance of the Parable: “That son, who receives from the father the portion of his inheritance that is due to him ... and squanders it in ‘loose living,’” is “the man of every period, beginning with the one who was the first to lose the inheritance of grace and original justice. ... The parable indirectly touches upon every breach of the covenant of love, every loss of grace, every sin.”²⁵ After experiencing the loss of material goods and friends, the prodigal son was able “to see himself and his actions in their full truth (this vision in truth is a genuine form of humility).”²⁶

²² “... quantumvis iustitia habeatur vera in homine virtus in Deoque transcendentalis perfectio, amorem tamen ipsa esse «praestantior», et quidem idcirco praestantior, quod primarius maneat et principalis.” DM, 1191, n. 4. English translation: DMEng, p. 1023, no. 4.

²³ “... omnino per misericordiam proditur.” DM, 1191, n. 4. English translation: DMEng, 1023, no. 4.

²⁴ “Misericordia ergo distat a iustitia verumtamen cum ea non discordat.” DM, 1191, n. 4. English translation: DMEng, p. 1023, no. 4.

²⁵ “Filius enim iste, qui partem sibi obtingentis patrimonii recepit a patre domoque excedit, in regione longinqua eam dissipaturus «vivendo luxuriose», homo quadamtenus cuiusvis est aevi, iam inde ab eo, qui primus gratiae perdidit hereditatem pristinaeque honestatis... Etenim tramite obliquo tangit parabola omnem violationem pacti amoris, amissionem omnem gratiae, omne delictum.” DM, 1194, n. 5. English translation: DMEng, p. 1025, no. 5.

²⁶ “... se conspicari incipiat suaeque acta secundum totam veritatem (quae simul veritatis visio significat humilitatem veram.” DM, 1198, n. 6. English translation: DMEng, p. 1029, no. 6.

Once his son returned repentantly, the father embraced him in love and forgiveness, a sign of God the Father’s eternal love: “This love is able to reach down to every prodigal son, to every human misery, and above all to every form of moral misery, to sin.”²⁷ The parable thus expresses “the reality of conversion.”²⁸ Mercy is revealed to be a “creative proof of love which does not allow itself to be ‘conquered by evil,’ but overcomes ‘evil with good’.”²⁹

The mercy and justice of God are best revealed in the mystery of Christ’s redemptive suffering, death, and resurrection. “Indeed this Redemption is the ultimate and definitive revelation of the holiness of God, who is the absolute fullness of perfection: fullness of justice and of love, since justice is based on love, flows from it and tends towards it.”³⁰ In Christ’s passion,

absolute justice is expressed, for Christ undergoes the passion and cross because of the sins of humanity. This constitutes even a “superabundance” of justice, for the sins of man are “compensated for” by the sacrifice of the Man-God. Nevertheless, this justice, which is properly justice “to God’s measure,” springs completely from love: from the love of the Father and of the Son, and completely bears fruit in love. Precisely for this reason the divine justice revealed in the cross of Christ is “to God’s measure,” because it springs from love and is

²⁷ “Talis propterea amor inclinatur se potest super omnem prodigum filium miseriamque humanam ac praesertim super moralem quamque egestatem, id est peccatum.” DM, 1198, n. 6. English translation: DMEng, 1029, no. 6.

²⁸ “... veritatem conversionis.” DM 1198, n. 6. English translation: DMEng, p. 1029, no. 6.

²⁹ “... comprobationem apprime creaticem amoris, qui «vinci a malo» se non patitur sed qui vincit «in bono malum».” DM, 1199, n. 6. English translation: DMEng, p. 1030, no. 6.

³⁰ “Quae quidem ipsa redemption est novissima ac definitiva patefactio sanctitatis Dei, qui et ipse absoluta vicissim est perfectionis consummation: videlicet plenitudo iustitiae et amoris, quandoquidem amori superstruitur iustitia ex eoque profluit et ad eum contendit.” DM, 1200-1201, n. 7. English translation: DMEng, p. 1031, no. 7.

accomplished in love, producing fruits of salvation.³¹

Precisely because of this, “redemption involves the revelation of mercy in its fullness,”³² for divine mercy “is able to justify man, to restore justice in the sense of that salvific order which God willed from the beginning in man and, through man, in the world.”³³

In her song, the *Magnificat*, Mary “glorified that mercy shared in ‘from generation to generation’ by those who allow themselves be guided by the fear of God.”³⁴ The Mother of God is also the mother of Mercy and the model for the Church. The Church “professes and proclaims mercy – the most stupendous attribute of the Creator and of the Redeemer – when she brings people close to the sources of the Savior’s mercy, of which she is the trustee and dispenser.”³⁵ This is seen especially in the Sacrament of the Most Holy Eucharist and the Sacrament of Reconciliation or Confession.³⁶ In these Sacraments, believers encounter the Merciful

Redeemer who offers us Himself: His grace which forgives and heals.

Because God’s mercy is infinite, “[o]n the part of man only a lack of good will can limit it, a lack of readiness to be converted and to repent, in other words persistence in obstinacy, opposing grace and truth.”³⁷ This is why “[i]n no passage of the Gospel message does forgiveness, or mercy as its source, mean indulgence towards evil, towards scandals, towards injury or insult.”³⁸ Therefore,

[t]he Church rightly considers it her duty and the purpose of her mission to guard the authenticity of forgiveness, both in life and behavior and in educational and pastoral work. She protects it simply by guarding its source, which is the mystery of the mercy of God Himself as revealed in Jesus Christ.³⁹

Divine Mercy and Justice, and the Natural Law

The mercy and justice revealed in Christ upholds and perfects the natural moral law. Man created in God’s own image and likeness has an order written upon his heart which conforms to his nature and, therefore, directs him to his true happiness.⁴⁰ It places him in a right relationship with the world, with his fellow man, and with God His Creator. God has written His law on the human heart.

The natural moral law is articulated in the Ten Commandments, the law which corresponds to

³¹ “... absoluta idcirco declaratur iustitia, quod Christus propter hominum generis delicta suffert passionem et mortem. Haec omnino est iustitiae «superabundantia», cum hominis peccata «compensentur» hominis-Dei sacrificio. Verum istius modi iustitia, quae plane iustitia est «secundum mensuram» Dei, ex amore nascitur omnis; Patris nominatim Filiique amore, necnon tota de amore fructificat. Hanc prorsus ob causam divina iustitia in Christi cruce relecta «secundum mensuram» Dei est, quia oritur ex amore in amoreque perficitur, dum fructus parit salutis.” DM, 1201, n. 7. English translation: DMEng, pp. 1031-1032, no. 7.

³² “... misericordiae revelationem importat secum redemptio pro ipsius plenitudine.” DM 1201, n. 7. English translation, p. 1032, no. 7.

³³ “... quae hominem potest iustum facere iustitiamque ipsam reficere, prout ea ordo salvificus est, quem ab initio Deus in homo optaverat ac per hominem in mundo.” DM, 1201, n. 7. English translation: DMEng, p. 1032, no. 7.

³⁴ “... illam celebraret misericordiam, cuius «in progenies et progenies» fiunt ei participes, qui se Dei patiuntur dirigi timorem.” DM, 1210, n. 10. English translation: DMEng, p. 1039, no. 10.

³⁵ “... misericordiam confitetur et divulgat – summe mirandam Creatoris Redemptorisque proprietatem – necnon cum homines pertrahit ad fontes misericordiae Servatoris, quam ipsa apud se custodit ac distribuit.” DM, 1210, n. 13. English translation: DMEng, p. 1047, no. 13.

³⁶ Cf. DM, 1219, n. 13.

³⁷ “In homine tamen circumscribere eam potest sola deficiens bona voluntas, nulla videlicet conversionis ac paenitentiae voluntas, id es perseverantia in obstinatione ac repugnantia tum gratiae tum veritati.” DM, 1220, n. 13. English translation: DMEng, p. 1048, no. 13.

³⁸ “Nullo prorsus Evangelici nuntii loco venia – neque fons quidem eius misericordiae – significat indulgentiam in malum, in scandalum, in iniuriam aut contumeliam inflictam.” DM, 1226-1227, n. 14. English translation: DMEng, p. 1054, no. 14.

³⁹ “Merito sane iudicat Ecclesia proprium ut munus suique ut finem officii esse germanam veniae indolem custodire, tum in vita moribusque tum in eruditone actioneque pastoralis. Eam autem non aliter Ecclesia tutatur quam fonte ipsius conservando, id est mysterio misericordiae Dei in Christo Iesu recluso.” DM, 1227, n. 14. English translation: DMEng, p. 1054, no. 14.

⁴⁰ Cf. Rom 2, 12-16.

the order which God has placed in His creation, the order which is a participation in the truth, goodness and beauty of His own Being. It is a law which every man, created with intelligence and free will in the image and likeness of God, knows in his deepest being. It is a law which man, the only earthly creature created in the image and likeness of God, is able to contemplate, to respect and to observe. It is the law of man's stewardship of creation, of man's participation in God's providential care of the world and, above all, of His sons and daughters destined for communion with Him forever in the Kingdom of Heaven. It is manifested in man's native capacity to know truth from falsehood, good from evil, and beauty from ugliness.

Our Lord Jesus Christ gave the fullness of expression to the moral law, to the Decalogue, in the Sermon on the Mount, in the Beatitudes. But every man, through his conscience, knows it and is held to observe it.⁴¹ After the first three Commandments which pertain to our very relationship with God Himself, our worship of Him alone, and the Fourth Commandment which governs the family as the origin and secure haven of human life, the Fifth Commandment, "Thou shalt not kill,"⁴² gives expression to the law within the human soul which makes any attack on innocent and defenseless human life repulsive, and pure and selfless service of all human life attractive.

God who gave us the natural law redeems us through the grace of the Gospel of Christ. God never contradicts Himself. The apostolate of the respect for human life is not, therefore, based on some idea, some man-made agenda or ideology, which may or may not succeed for a longer or shorter period of time. It is founded upon the very reality of our human nature and, above all, upon the reality of Christ Who is the "way, the truth, and the life," Who alone is our Savior.⁴³ Through our conscience, we come to recognize what is true, good, and beautiful, which God never fails to communicate to us.

The apostolate of the respect for the integrity of marriage and the family similarly is not based upon some man-made agenda or ideology. It is founded upon the very reality of our human nature, male and female, upon the truth that man and woman are made sexually for each other, and that their sexual union is the expression of the faithful and enduring love of the marriage bond whose highest fruit is the procreation of offspring. Moreover, on the level of grace, it is founded upon our faith in Christ Who elevates the marriage of man and woman to a Sacrament, an image of his relationship to the Church.⁴⁴

We, therefore, must not give way to discouragement in the struggle against the advancement of the anti-life and anti-family agenda which would have as its final result the destruction not only of man as an individual, but of society itself. Our engagement in the pro-life and pro-family apostolate is an essential expression of our participation in the merciful love of God.

To help the poor, we must know the faith profoundly and practice it with integrity. Clearly, an essential part of our faith is our belief in God's mercy. Belief in divine mercy is part of belief in the immeasurable and unceasing love of God, which is represented for us by the Divine Heart and, after the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ, by His Most Sacred Heart.

Conclusion

This brief reflection introduces us to the richness of divine mercy in its relationship with divine justice. It helps us to understand the depth of the present and widespread discussion of mercy. Mercy does not constitute an easy response to the great challenges of the Christian life in the world, a response which may ignore the demands of justice. It constitutes rather the response which engages all of our intelligence and will, according to the plan of God for us and for our world. It constitutes the most demanding response which corresponds to the deepest requirements of justice and goes beyond them with the pure and selfless love which comes

⁴¹ Cf. Rom 2, 14-16.

⁴² Ex 20, 13.

⁴³ Jn 14, 6.

⁴⁴ Cf. Eph 5, 32.

into our hearts from the glorious pierced Heart of Jesus. Faith in the mercy of God is integral to our faith in the immeasurable and unceasing love of God, represented for us in the Divine Heart, and, after the Incarnation of Our Lord, in His Most Sacred Heart.

The covenant of love which God has established with us by means of the Death and Resurrection of His only-begotten Son is the only source of our mercy toward our neighbor, especially the neighbor in most need. We are co-workers with Christ, His soldiers, whose incorporation into His being as Son of God, into His Mystical Body, express our nature by love for God and for our neighbor. Our charity is always defined by our life in Christ Who inspires and strengthens us in bringing the love of the Father to every neighbor and especially to the neighbor who is experiencing a time of great need.

Let us pray through the intercession of our Blessed Mother, that the love we receive from the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, the love which reveals always the eternal mercy of the Father may find its daily realization in our life, in the worship of God and in the service of others. May the observance of the Extraordinary Year of Divine Mercy bring us, in abundance, the sevenfold gift of the Holy Spirit for a life lived in the mercy of God and for the mercy of God.