

# "Mercy"

## A Reflection at the Close of the Year of Mercy

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First of all, my gratitude and appreciation to all of you for your great cooperation and the excitement evidenced by the many and various ways you embraced our observance of the Year of Mercy.

Cardinal Kasper, in his marvelous book, *Mercy: The Essence of the Gospel and the Key to Christian Life*, writes:

“The most important expression for understanding mercy is *hesed*, which means unmerited loving kindness, friendliness favor, and also divine grace and mercy. *Hesed*, therefore, goes beyond mere emotion and grief at human deprivation; it means God’s free and gracious turning toward the human person with care. It concerns a concept of relationship, which characterizes not only a single action, but rather an ongoing attitude and posture.....”

As we come to the official close of our observance of the Year of Mercy, hopefully each of us has had ample opportunities to experience just that: not simply “mere emotion and grief at human deprivation,” but also – and significantly more importantly – “an ongoing attitude and posture” of being what Pope Francis described as “Credible Witnesses of Mercy.”

The Late Orthodox Metropolitan Anthony Bloom of Sourozh often noted that our contemporary translation of “have mercy” is a limited and insufficient one. The Greek word used in the Gospels and in the liturgies of the Early Church is *eleison*. *Eleison* is of the same root as *elaion*, which means olive tree and the oil from it. Search both the Old and the New Testaments, and you will find a number of parables and events connected with this basic idea. For example, after the flood, Noah sends birds to determine if there is any dry land, and one of them – a dove – and it is significant that it is a dove – returns to the ark with a small twig of an olive tree. This twig conveys to Noah and to all with him in the ark the news that the wrath of God has ceased, that God is now offering mankind a fresh opportunity.

In the New Testament, in the Parable of the Good Samaritan for example, olive oil is poured to soothe and to heal. In the anointing of kings and priests in the Old Testament, it is again olive oil that is poured on the head as an image of the grace of God that comes down on them: in Psalm 133, we pray “Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity! It is like the precious oil upon the head, running down upon the beard, upon the beard of Aaron, running down on the collar of his robes!” – giving kings and priests new power to fulfill what is beyond human capabilities.

The oil speaks first of all of the end of the wrath of God, of the peace which God offers to the people who have offended him. But the oil also speaks of God healing us in order that we might be able to live and become what we are called to be and yet he knows that we are not capable of becoming on our own - individuals created in his image and called every day to grow more and more into his likeness. Hence, God pours his grace

and mercy abundantly on us, empowering us to imitate him in our merciful interactions with our fellow human beings.

I would remind us all of the words of Saint John Paul II in *Dives in Misericordia*: “The Church lives an authentic life when she professes and proclaims mercy – the most stupendous attribute of the Creator and of the Redeemer.....” Hopefully we as Knights and Ladies of the Holy Sepulchre have lived “an authentic life professing and proclaiming mercy” during this Year of Mercy. But let us not limit our experience of such “an authentic life” to a single year: may each and every year be for us a Year of Mercy.