

# Missionaries and the Year of Mercy

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Mercy is defined in the Catholic Catechism as "The loving kindness, compassion or forbearance shown to one who offends. Others define it, in substance, as the Works of Mercy."

Jesus defines it for us in that he SEES with compassion changing the lives of many by his loving look. He sees the widow's only son has just died and acts. Is touched to the heart and restores him to his mother. Peter after denying Christ three times gets a compassionate and forgiving look from Jesus. He is ashamed and is totally crushed. He realized what he just did, that he is pardoned and still deeply loved. With that one glance of Jesus he is healed, freed and is later given the mission to lead the Church.

Jesus SPEAKS with compassion again changing lives. He calls Matthew the tax collector telling him that he wants to eat in his house thus creating a new Matthew. He also is called to be an apostle. The Samaritan woman at the well was the shaded woman of the town who converses with Jesus. She is transformed as she runs to announce Jesus's presence to the others. She has been given a mission.

Jesus HEARS with compassion the cry of the outcast. The blind man beside the road in Jericho cries out to him for sight. Jesus is sensitive to this one man's cry among a crowd of people. He hears the Phoenician woman who wants her daughter healed. Her humility and faith he praises.

Jesus TOUCHES with compassion bringing wholeness. To a leper an unclean outcast, who the law forbids to be even near the village. He makes whole again. He takes by hand the young girl saying 'Talitha Kum' and brings her back to life. At the last supper he washes the feet of his disciple's one of his last gifted signs for them to do likewise. Their mission – our mission is to serve.

He want us to use our eyes, ears, tongs and hands to heal, pardon, give new life in the lives of the outcast of society. We can make a difference if we are attentive as Jesus was. Gradually these children of God can be healed and freed to become even an agent of their own promotion.

This isn't only a challenge for missionaries but to all the faithful. What is unique to those of us working in the Holy Land which is far from HOLY in the nitty gritty of life here?

Our realities in 2016 are: there are less than 2% Christians left of the Arab population. When I came here 40 years ago there was 5%. Those who left became educated, middle class and wanted a better life for their children. They wanted security and a gamut of opportunities which were denied them. They left for fear

being squeezed between Jews and Muslims cultures, morals and political orientations. Few have remained being bridges between the two peoples. Those remaining are the elderly and those without the skills to advance. They need to tell us; they need to tell their story.

Who is the local church now? The majority are the foreign workers many of whom are illegal in the land. They work long hours under stressful conditions their children are not recognized by the government. Injustices to these people of God are plenty. They are Filipinos, from Thailand, Ethiopia, Eritrean and many are from North African countries. From the Philippines there are 60,000 alone of whom the majority is Catholics. These peoples need religious priests and sisters who can speak their languages, share the Eucharist, listen to their stories and have the know how to help them legally, pastorally, and economically. Meeting these people's needs is a huge challenge to the local church that needs missionaries.

The Holy Land calls out in agony for peace between the peoples of the three religions. Most of us are well placed to witness as we live among Jews, Muslims and Christians in hospitals, schools, homes for the seniors, handicapped, and have guest houses. We have the occasions to rub shoulders with the middle class who are often those who are important collaborators in the assistance to the very poor. Many of us religious have passed from having gray to thinning white hair; aging brings questions about our future. Can the dwindling numbers of local laymen replace us? Can Jews and Muslims interiorize our values so the weakest is heard?

Politics doesn't lend to justice solutions, those that heal. We religious keep a low profile in this area as we need to have our residency renewed regularly. A misplaced comment could be detrimental. We watch the ever changing scene and pray.

A faithful life is in listening and in dialogue with the Lord is essential as one stands before these brothers and sisters in need. The Eucharist is center; it is the place we receive our strength and insights. It heightens our sight, hearing, well tunes our speech and helps us know when a touch can bring healing. As sinners we are healed here also.

We need an extra dose of HOPE. Otherwise realities get too heavy to witness mercy in daily encounters. As the political, economic, moral and social realities change, they influence our ministries. We must be grounded in HOPE. I like the song "*You have to have Hope at the Crossroads*".