

**BE MERCIFUL LIKE THE FATHER (LUKE 6:36):
ENTERING INTO THE MYSTERY OF GOD'S MERCY**

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ABSTRACT

The invitation of Pope Francis to Catholics and the world in general to celebrate a Jubilee Year of Mercy is both a profession of faith in God's goodness and an invitation to become like him. This presupposes the fact that while we acknowledge that God is undeniably merciful, human beings who are often recipients of God's mercy are far from being merciful. In a world that is daily characterized by violence and hurts inflicted by human beings upon one another, in a world filled with injustice and oppression inflicted by people who claim special affiliation to God; The face of God has become hidden and mercy seems more like an empty slogan, an unattainable goal. Yet, in relationships and legal processes, many continue to beg for mercy and hope that mercy will cushion the shortcomings in their relationships, but it is still a scarce virtue in human beings. No wonder many regard it as essentially an attribute of God that human beings are called to cultivate.

This paper examines the nature of mercy as an attribute of God and why human beings need it today. It also places in the right perspective the human desire to be like God by examining the necessary relationship between human virtues and divine attributes that provide the firm foundation for all virtues. In the final analysis, the paper argues that we can talk of human virtues only because human beings have been made in the image of God, and only God gives the true meaning to all human striving.

In the course of human history, certain years have been set aside to mark certain events. In essence, the year so set aside offered the world renewed opportunity to pay attention to the theme and to work towards the actualization of certain objects closely related to the theme. For instance, the Jubilee Year 2000 was set aside to mark the 2000 years of the Christian faith and the presence of Jesus Christ in human history. The Year of St. Paul proclaimed by Pope Benedict XVI took place between June 28, 2008, and June 29, 2009 to celebrate the 2000 years since the birth of St. Paul. Activities of the year focused on the life and writings of St. Paul, with a renewed call to Christians to model their life after this great apostle to the nations. The Jubilee Year of Mercy, declared by Pope Francis and fixed for between December 13, 2015 and November 20, 2016 is meant to draw humanity's attention to one of the attributes of God, that of mercy and to invite human beings to work to receive this mercy as they extend the same to their fellow human beings. The theme of the Jubilee Year of Mercy captures this succinctly: "Be merciful like the Father." (Luke 6:36)

This presupposes that mercy is inherently to be found in God. It belongs to his nature as God to be merciful. Secondly, the mercy ascribed to God is not something that enhances his nature or an abstract quality. Mercy is ascribed to God because it is the essence of God, a mode of being, and a mode of doing something principally directed towards his creatures. God is merciful thus makes sense when fully expressed as God is merciful to his creatures. Human beings are the principal recipients of God's mercy. The call of the Jubilee Year of Mercy is for human beings to become like God; to be merciful, in this regard, not to God, since he does not need it, but to other human beings who constantly stand in need of mercy or loving kindness.

This goal of this paper is to clearly situate mercy as a divine attribute that is found in a preeminent way only in God but one which God also invites his children to share, such that through the practice of mercy, the divine transforms the earthly and the earthly is uplifted in an embrace of redeeming love. The first part of the paper is devoted to an examination of the term mercy. This is then followed by an examination of mercy as an attribute of God by a close study of some biblical passages. The next part examines the implication of man's beneficial relationship with God that is experienced in merciful deeds. Thus this part deals also with an examination of mercy as a virtue, especially as an effective virtue, one that the world is in dire need of today, just as the world is always in great need of the mercy of God.

Definition

The Hebrew word for mercy is *hesed*. This is often translated as God's loving kindness or God's covenant love. According to *Theopedia*, "The term **mercy** may designate both character and actions that emerge as a consequence of that character."² Viewed as a character, it is expressed in the form of compassion and forbearance. As an action, acts of mercy often include pardon, forgiveness or reduction of penalties. According to Louis Berkhof, mercy is "The goodness or love of God shown to those who are in misery or distress, irrespective of their deserts."³ It is a kind treatment accorded someone who deserves to be treated harshly. It is also in the nature of mercy, that it is exercised by a person who has another in his power or debt, or under his authority, for instance, a creditor or a judge. This understanding is well brought out in the Hebrew *Racham* – which means "to love," "to have compassion," or "to show mercy." Another way to understand mercy is to contrast it with grace. While Grace is getting what we don't deserve, hence it is known as *gratis* – free gift; Mercy is not getting what we do deserve. The Greek equivalent of mercy is *Oiktirmos* which means "compassion" or "pity." From the above analysis, mercy can be ascribed to both God and man, both can be merciful, but only man can experience the mercy of God and cannot exercise mercy towards God because God is not under the authority of man, but human beings are under the authority of God. It is this understanding that ascribes mercy to God as an attribute and to human beings as a virtue.

There have also been debates about whether mercy is virtue or passion. In the *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas remarked:

Mercy signifies grief for another's distress. Now this grief may denote, in one way, a movement of the sensitive appetite, in which case mercy is not a virtue but a passion; whereas, in another way, it may denote a movement of the intellective appetite, in as much as one person's evil is displeasing to another. This movement may be ruled in accordance with reason, and in accordance with this movement regulated by reason, the movement of the lower appetite may be regulated. Hence Augustine says (De Civ. Dei ix, 5) that "this movement of the mind" (viz. mercy) "obeys the reason, when mercy is vouchsafed in such a way that justice is safeguarded, whether we give to the needy or forgive the repentant." And since it is essential to human virtue that the movements of the soul should be regulated by reason, as was shown above (I-II, 59, A4,5), it follows that mercy is a virtue.⁴

Furthermore, in the consideration of whether mercy is the greatest virtue, Thomas Aquinas says:

A virtue may take precedence of others in two ways: first, in itself; secondly, in comparison with its subject. On itself, mercy takes precedence of other virtues, for it belongs to mercy to be bountiful to others, and, what is more, to

succor others in their wants, which pertains chiefly to one who stands above. Hence mercy is accounted as being proper to God: and therein His omnipotence is declared to be chiefly.⁵

Biblical Foundations of mercy as attribute and virtue

From a theological perspective, mercy is rooted in God and experienced in relation to God, from whom it may be acquired as a Christian virtue and exercised in relation to fellow human beings. Mercy is a central theme in the Old Testament as clearly illustrated in the theme of the Covenant. Though the covenant is essentially a relationship of love between God and his people, Israel, it was a relationship kept alive by the *hesed*, the loving kindness and forgiveness shown by God to his people. For instance, we read: “Do not hold past iniquities against us; may your compassion come quickly, for we have been brought very low. Help us, God our saviour for the glory of your name. Deliver us, pardon our sins for your name’s sake.” (Ps 79:8-9) Hence, according to Stackpole,

... if we understand mercy in the Biblical sense, then without any fear of error contrary to the faith, it can be said that mercy is the greatest attribute of God... [in other words] within this Biblical understanding, the results of the activity of merciful love are the greatest in the world and in this respect, mercy surpasses all other Divine attributes.⁶

In the New Testament, God’s mercy is vividly and unequivocally seen in the sacrificial death of his only begotten Son, Jesus. His death was an act of mercy, a ransom that only God could come up with. The Hebrew word, *Kapporeth*, expresses this same understanding, since it means "ransom," "propitiatory," Hence we read “But God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.” (Rom 5:8) If God has done this much for human beings, the same is required of them. “Be merciful like the Father.” (Luke 6:36) And it does not stop there, there is always a reward for virtue, hence “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.” (Matt 5:7)

Mercy as an attribute of God

Mercy is one of the intrinsic attribute of God. It is one that is easily seen, experienced and talked about in the Old Testament (Ex. 34:6; Deut. 4:31, 2Chr. 30:9; Jonah 4:2). Numerous Psalms celebrate God’s mercy and sinners confidently bask in its availability. While God’s mercy is freely bestowed on the people if they repent, it is equally withdrawn on many occasion and draws down on the people severe judgment, such as in the flood, and the punishment of the people following the rebellion at Horeb. However, since mercy is a quality intrinsic to God’s nature, God’s judgment and discipline do not preclude mercy, they rather open new vistas of God's mercy. For instance, the following passages show that God’s mercy always shines out and can be hoped for even in crisis, or when the wrath of God is being suffered. (2 Sam 24:14 ; Psalm 51: 1; Psalm 57:1 ; Isa 55:7 ; 60:10 ; Jer 31:20 ; Hab. 3:2)

When placed in the same situation, mercy does not come naturally to human beings, a lack of mercy is more natural to the human condition (Prov. 12:10). In 2 Sam 24: 12-16, even the choice of pestilence instead of being pursued by his enemy three months reiterates the fact that David felt more confident of finding mercy with God than from any human being. In this case as in many others, God’s mercy is also the unmerited and undeserved favour bestowed on his people. It is a free gift, that is why some call it favour or grace. (Gen 19:16; Exod. 33:19 and Jer 42:12) An expression of God’s mercy is his forgiveness of offence and the

people who commit them. The Psalms bear abundant testimony to the prevalence of mercy in such Psalms as [Psalm 25:6](#) ; [40:11](#); [51:1](#) ; [69:16](#) ; [103:4](#) ; [119:77](#) ; [Jer 3:12](#) ; [16:5](#).

While love epitomizes the core of the covenant between God and his people, it is vividly celebrated in the rich spectrum of acts that translate into mercy, such as compassion, forgiveness, pity, forbearance. Just like the love of God which is everlasting, God's mercy is also never-ending. Hence, in Lamentation, we read "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness."⁷

Expression of God's mercy in the New Testament

According to the fathers of the Second Vatican Council, "God, the inspirer and author of both Testaments, wisely arranged that the New Testament be hidden in the Old and the Old be made manifest in the New."⁸ Hence the OT celebrates and points to, is made more manifest in the NT in various ways, but especially in the incarnation and death of Jesus Christ. The gift of his only begotten Son, is still the expression of God's merciful love to sinful humanity, a testimony to God's abiding love and fidelity to his people and covenant agreement, a point solemnly recalled by Mary in the *Magnificat* (Luke 1, 50;54;58;72;78). As was the case with the covenant, when it comes to mercy, God is always the initiator and his mercy is gratuitous. This is a point not lost to Paul when he said, "So it depends not upon a person's will or exertion, but upon God, who shows mercy." (Rom 9:16) The bestowal of mercy is entirely God's prerogative ([2 Cor 1:3](#) ; [James 5:11](#)) and as Scripture testifies in numerous places, God grants it to whomever he wills. A useful example is the plight of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector in the Luke 18:9-14. Aware of his state as a sinner, and supposedly deserving of a harsh judgment, the tax collector entreated, "O God, be merciful to me a sinner." There is no doubt from the passage that he received mercy as a free gift from the Lord. Was it to show himself benevolent that he first leads people to disobedience as implied by Paul in Romans 11:30-36, or the disobedience of mankind became an opportunity to receive God's mercy? Whatever the case, this situation of fall, weakness and helplessness describes all humanity and so opens the door of salvation to the Gentiles and not only the covenant people, Israel.⁹ Peter said the same when he remarked:"Once you were not a people; but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy"(1 Pet 2:10). It is God the creator of all things that invites everyone into fellowship with him and an experience of his mercy. Hence it becomes all the more easy for people to cry for his help and mercy in their needs ([Luke 18:13](#) ; [2 Timothy 1:16](#) [Timothy 1:18](#) ; cf. [Matt 15:22](#) ; [17:15](#)).

Jesus, the physical embodiment and expression of mercy

The gospels testify clearly that Jesus is the perfect manifestation of the Father. The love of the Father for sinful humanity was demonstrated clearly in the life and death of Jesus, "for God so love the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life." (Jn 3:16) The one who was sent, who died for humanity is the expiation for our sins (1 Jn 4:10). In other words, Jesus is the actual expression of God's love and mercy. In his life, words, and deeds Jesus also displayed eloquently the mercy of God. We have the deliverance of the man possessed by unclean spirit as a good example. This was a pathetic case; he could not be helped by anyone. After his deliverance, Jesus said to him "Go home to your family and announce to them all that the Lord in his pity has done for you." (Mark 5: 19) The mercy shown to the man is in contrast to the seemingly lack of mercy shown to the herd of swine that was lost. This was Mark's way

of showing how much love and concern God has for human beings. A similar passage is found in Mark 10:47-52, when Bartimaeus was healed of his blindness. While the crowd showed no pity (mercy) to the blind man, Jesus proved himself different and granted the man's request. In a similar way, Jesus cleansed the ten lepers who begged for his pity (mercy) (Luke 17:13). These passages show clearly that the people recognized that only God could show them mercy, not human beings.

In other words, God's mercy or merciful love is shown in his saving acts to his people. While the exodus exemplifies the unfailing love of God for his people in the Old Testament, in the New Covenant, it is the passion, death and resurrection of Christ. While in the OT, God delivered his people from bondage to Pharaoh, in the NT he saved them from bondage to sin. Both must be seen as God's acts of mercy. Jesus is thus the physical and fullest expression of God's Mercy. Hence, Scripture says "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who in his great mercy gave us a new birth to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead..." (1 Pet. 1:3) In the same vein, we read, "But when the kindness and generous love of God our savior appeared, not because of any righteous deeds we had done but because of his mercy, he saved us through the bath of rebirth and renewal by the holy Spirit, whom he richly poured out on us through Jesus Christ our savior." (Titus 3:4-6)

The proper response to God's acts of mercy both in the OT and in the NT is that of reciprocity, this time, not to God, but to others around who stand in need of mercy. One of the expressions of mercy among human beings is called almsgiving and it is highly prized in the New Testament (Lk 11:41; 12:33). The most challenging response demanded of believers is compassion as exemplified in the Parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37). Mercy, otherwise celebrated as compassion, is expected of true disciples of Jesus. Here, mercy or compassion or pity is prized higher than pious observance of the law. 'Go and do likewise', Jesus told the Scholar of the law and all his followers are expected to heed the same injunction. In so doing, believers mirror the same saving act of God. This in essence is what living the life of God entails. For Luke, it means "Be merciful like the Father" (Luke 6:36) and Matthew avers that the merciful will be shown mercy (Mt 5:7), a situation that was graphically demonstrated in the Parable of the unforgiving servant (Mt 18: 21-35). Having been forgiven his huge debt by his master, he was expected to show mercy, or have pity on his fellow servant, but he did not. Consequently, he forfeited the mercy he had received as grace and received the wrath that he deserved.

Unable to respond to God's mercy by showing mercy to those who need it, human beings place themselves in position contrary to that ordained for them at creation, *imago dei*. Having been created in the very image of God, God has made it possible for human beings to have access to him. In the experience of God's mercy, we experience an in-breaking of God's kingdom and, in a similar way, by showing mercy to others, the in-breaking is extended to others. Refusal to practice mercy may therefore be likened to a denial of God or lack of faith in God. True faith in God must be expressed in real compassion towards others, hence, Jesus admonished the Pharisees to "Go and learn the meaning of the words, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.'" (Mt 9:13)

Appropriation of divine attribute in human affairs

While human beings were created in the divine image, they remain human beings, essentially limited, fragile, material and mortal. One of the consequences of original sin is the pervasive weakness that often dominates human affairs such that, in the words of Paul, “For I do not do the good I want, but I do the evil I do not want” (Rm 7:19). The only way opened to humanity to get out of this dark tunnel of weakness, sin and death is the inestimable grace of Jesus Christ (Rm7: 25; 8:1-10). In Christ, believers have a model to imitate. Christ embodies for the Christian the totality of the good desirable. In Christ and through Christ, a path is laid open to humanity and those who follow that path can hope to be recipient of the blessedness of heaven (cf. Matt 5:3-9). In deed there is need for this appropriation. Traditional Catholic theology has always seen God as immutable, unchanging, while this is true metaphysically, pastorally, it presents a picture of a God that is cold and uncaring, one that is hardly concerned about human affairs. It is difficult to conceive this God as a God of mercy. Yes, this precisely is the God that Christ has revealed to us. God is thus revealed as intimately involved in human affairs, uplifting it, redeeming it and transforming it. For Walter Kasper, mercy is a pastoral virtue, by which he means it is the virtue that brings love and Christ to people.

There are historical records to show the close affinity between Roman culture and the Christian faith, since the latter developed rapidly in the Greco-Roman environment. One of the things we learnt about the Romans is their excellent legal system with its disdain for indiscipline and preference for justice, discipline and courage. Mercy has no role to play in this environment. No wonder, the crucifixion of Jesus has been couched as a typical display of Roman punishment, full of torment, lacking in mercy. Whereas mercy in Latin is *Misericordia* – literally meaning – *miserable heart*, because it goes out in compassion to the recipient, hence to the Romans, it is a disease of the soul. Here the difference between Christianity and Roman culture begins. Where mercy was not valued hitherto, Jesus came and taught that “Blessed as the merciful” (Mt 5:9). By this preaching and his very life, Jesus clothe in desirability what was hitherto spurned. Mercy is no longer an emotion we feel secretly in our mind or heart. Mercy makes sense only if it is what we do. If mercy is also understood as compassion, then it is pity with action, it is feeling with, being one with the one who suffers or stands in need and doing something about it. Mercy is never an abstract idea; it must be expressed in action. This must be seen as an integral aspect of spirituality and religiosity. Jesus desires mercy much more than sacrifice, thus, the righteous must be a merciful person. The more righteous or spiritual one is, the more merciful one becomes. The righteous person is one who has been able to conform his life to God and lives in fidelity to his or her nature of having been created in God’s image.

As object of God’s mercy, human beings are therefore called to become agents of mercy. In the words of Cardinal Kasper,

This is exactly how God himself deals with us. God bends down in order to raise us up; to comfort us and to heal our wounds; and to give us a new chance, to bestow on us new life and new hope. And who would be so self-righteous as to think that he would not need such mercy? Mercy is the name of our God. Mercy is the call to be a human being, who feels with other human beings who suffer and are in need. Mercy is the call to be a real Christian, who follows the example of Christ and meets Christ in his suffering brothers and sisters. Mercy is the essence of the Gospel and the key to Christian life. Mercy

is the best and most beautiful news that can be told to us and that we should bring to the world. As God by his mercy always gives us a new chance, a new future, our mercy gives future to the other, and to a world that needs it so much.¹⁰

Human beings ought to cultivate the practice of mercy as one of their habits. The more noble, the better.

What is virtue?

“From the Latin word *vir*, meaning “man,” the Romans formed the word *virtus* to describe such so-called “manly” qualities as firmness of purpose and courage. Gradually this word was used for any good qualities in males or females. The English word *virtue* came by way of French from Latin *virtus*.¹¹ Virtue then is considered to be a good and moral quality or a morally good behavior or character. Virtue is also seen as a commendable quality or trait, otherwise regarded a particular moral excellence. It is also a capacity to act, which in classical philosophical term is a potency.

Is virtue then an action or emotion? Thinkers such as Marc Jackson argues that virtues are good emotions, these include love, kindness, pity etc. For him these virtues are not character traits expressed by action, but emotions that people feel and are emotions developed essentially by feeling much more than by acting.¹² For Kant, a virtuous act must be in conforming to moral principle. Even Aristotle’s conception of Virtue as being closer to the golden mean, a point closer to one extreme than the other suggest that virtue relates to action. For him, virtues are not about feeling, since they are not acquired without a deliberate choice. No wonder, for Aristotle, virtue is excellence, and not just an average deed.¹³ In other words, virtue is not just action, but what makes us act in a certain way. Hence Arthur F. Holmes describes “virtues” in the following way:

A virtue is a right inner disposition, and a disposition is a tendency to act in certain ways. Disposition is more basic, lasting and pervasive than the particular motive or intention behind a certain action. It differs from a sudden impulse in being a settled habit of mind, an internalized and often reflective trait. Virtues are general character traits that provide inner sanctions on our particular motives, intentions and outward conduct.¹⁴

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* provides a holistic view of virtue when it defines *Human virtues* as:

Firm attitudes, stable dispositions, habitual perfections of intellect and will that govern our actions, order our passions, and guide our conduct according to reason and faith. They make possible ease, self-mastery, and joy in leading a morally good life. The virtuous man is he who freely practices the good. The moral virtues are acquired by human effort. They are the fruit and seed of morally good acts; they dispose all the powers of the human being for communion with divine love.¹⁵

Putting all these traits together, the same documents says that “Virtue is a habitual and firm disposition to do good.”¹⁶ Seen this way, the list of virtues includes Prudence, Justice, Fortitude and Temperance, together known as the Cardinal virtues and, Faith, Hope and Love known as the Theological virtues. We also have Chastity, Generosity, Temperance, Brotherly love, Meekness, Humility and Diligence, sometimes referred to as the Capital virtues. A careful study should show that Mercy is not listed as a virtue. What then do we

make of mercy as virtue to be cultivated and practiced by human beings? Hence the analysis of Ferkany as to the nature of mercy is incisive at this stage.

According to Ferkany, Mercy may be viewed as (1) Forgiveness of wrongdoing by someone, but principally overcoming hatred or resentment and the desire to punish the person who wronged us. (2) The penalty that someone deserves but is withdrawn, or reduced by the one who has the right to impose it, principally so that the execution of the penalty does not cause usual suffering to the person again; (3) Intentionally and compassionately treating another less harshly than we have reason to do, either morally or rationally; (4) Treating a person less harshly than, given certain rules, one has a right to treat that person.¹⁷ According to Ferkany, (1) is the least adequate form of mercy, since it is experienced only as forgiveness, and mercy goes beyond forgiving another person. For almost the same reason, Ferkany says the second conception is also inadequate. Conception (3) and (4) are worth evaluating in detail. Conception (3) requires that the agent of mercy must have the intention and be motivated by compassion. For this conception of mercy, its activities are done not from selfish reasons. As with the forgiveness element of mercy, Ferkany wonders if compassion is essential to mercy. Spiritually speaking this would have been an absurd thinking, but as an intellectual and rational discourse, it is a question worth examining.

If compassion is the painful emotion of having the suffering of another as its object and the desire to relieve it, which perfectly coincides with its Latin root – *cum passio* – to suffer with, some have argued that altruistic persons could perform their acts of mercy without experiencing the emotion we call compassion. The other explanation from the people of faith is to regard this deed and similar ones not pious acts but social acts. Ferkany actually listed situations where compassion may be difficult to muster, such as when the agent of mercy has been grievously wronged, or when the recipient is not experiencing any suffering.¹⁸

Where then does mercy lie? For Ferkany, and even Cardinal Kasper, mercy assumes its importance only when there is a right to treat another harshly and this is forgone. According to Ferkany,

Mercy is normally possible only when relevant social rules give us a right to treat another harshly. Having a fairly strong reason is not enough... mercy, as a form of charity, has a gift-life quality as part of its normative structure. So mercy ordinarily cannot be demanded in-principle, but only implored or pleaded for.¹⁹

In the final analysis, mercy is intrinsically unmerited and undeserved, if it is deserved, then it falls under the realm of justice. God has shown his mercy to human beings, not because he derives any benefit from it, that would be selfish, or because it offers him opportunity to show compassion, he would be causing us harm or suffering just so he could show pity and this would be contrary to his nature as the supreme goodness. Human acts of mercy, therefore, must fulfill the same criteria. The point I am making is that if the exercise of mercy is out of man's goodness to another, or that it makes man feel good and look good, then the exercise of it is conditioned and does not meet the standard set by God. God is merciful to his creature because it is his nature, it is not required of him. Being merciful is who he is. This is what human beings are called to imitate, emulate and incarnate in their own relationship.

The exercise of mercy by God is the communication of his perfection to his creature, that is why Aquinas says that mercy is not just affective emotion, but effective, because it must involve a positive action. The mercy of God is not an abstract reality, it is a concrete experience, at this junction, human exercise of mercy cannot but follow the same path.

Aquinas writes: "To feel sad about another's misery is no attribute of God, but to drive it out is supremely His, and by misery here we mean any sort of defect. Defects are not done away with save by an achievement of goodness, and as we have said, God is the first source of goodness"²⁰

In the final analysis, while mercy is one of the attributes of God, the Jubilee Year of Mercy invites all people to embrace the practice of mercy towards others and actually make a habit. Mercy, seen as a desirable virtue is both a tendency and disposition arising from the core of our being, persons created in the image of God, who must, therefore, act in a certain way – like God himself. Mercy as a virtue then is more than an occasional impulse or a burst of energy to be good, flowing from God's goodness to human beings, it ought to become a habitual state of the mind, that propels us to act in this manner always, like God. In the *Bull of Indiction for the Jubilee Year of Mercy*, Pope Francis reminds humanity that "without the witness to mercy, life becomes fruitless and sterile, as if sequestered in a barren desert... Mercy is the force that reawakens us to new life and instils in us the courage to look to the future with hope."²¹

In conclusion, the virtue of mercy relates to who we are, *imago dei*. This is also true of the Church as a body, hence Pope John Paul II asserts "The Church lives in an authentic life when she professes and proclaims mercy – the most stupendous attribute of the Creator and of the Redeemer – and when she brings people close to the sources of the Saviour's mercy, of which she is the trustee and dispenser."²² Hence, for human beings, mercy remains a necessary virtue to be cultivated and constantly nourished especially when it seems that human nature is more inclined to righting wrongs in the name of justice than restoring relationships in quest of our fundamental identity as persons in communion with God and the other. The plea for mercy is always a call directed to the core of life, be it divine life or human life. When we beg for God's mercy, we appeal to his nature as God who is infinitely good to his creatures. When others plead for mercy from us, they are always appealing for the goodness in us to come to the fore. Thus, mercy should not be a seasonal subject, an occasional enterprise, but an enduring character. Then shall we experience mercy as an attribute, an enduring trait reflecting our true identity and as a virtuous response to a world constantly in need of mercy. Then, we would have plumbed in some measures, the depth of the mystery of God.

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² Mercy in Theopedia, <http://www.theopedia.com/mercy>, accessed July 26, 2016.

³ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, Part I, On the Communicable attributes of God. p. 72.

⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologia*, Q 30, Mercy, Article 3, General reply.

⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *ST*, Q 30, Article 4, General reply.

⁶ Robert Stackpole, *Mercy is God's Greatest Attribute*, online publication in <http://www.thedivinemercy.org/library/article.php?NID=70> retrieved on July 29, 2016

⁷ Lamentations 3:22-23 English Standard Version (ESV).

⁸ Dei Verbum, no 16

⁹ Cf. Romans 15: 7-9

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¹⁰ Walter Kasper, *The message of Mercy*. America: The National Review, September 15, 2014.

¹¹ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/virtue>

¹² Marc Jackson, *Emotion and Psyche*. Hants, UK: O- Books, 2010, p. 12

¹³ Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* II, 6

¹⁴ Arthur F. Holmes. *Ethics: Approving Moral Decisions*, *Contours of Christian Philosophy*, ed. C. Stephen Evans Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1984, 116.

¹⁵ Catechism of the Catholic Church, Article 7, no 1804.

¹⁶ CCC no 1833

¹⁷ Matt, Ferkany. *Mercy as an Environmental Virtue*. *Environmental Values*. 20 (2): 266-267.

¹⁸ Ferkany, p. 268.

¹⁹ Ferkany p. 268-269.

²⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Theologia*. 1, 21.3

²¹ Pope Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy, 11 April, 2015, 10

²² John Paul II, *Dives in Misericordia*, A papal encyclical on mercy, 1980, 13.