

## Franciscan Focus of Mercy

Mercy at the Heart  
of Francis' Conversion



***PRAYER OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS  
FOR THE EXTRAORDINARY JUBILEE OF MERCY\****

**Misericordes sicut Pater!  
(Paul Inwood)**

*Am*            *F*            *Gsus<sup>4</sup>* *G*    *C*            *F*            *Dm*            *Esus<sup>4</sup>* *E*    *Am*  
*Cm*            *Ab*            *Bbsus<sup>4</sup>* *Bb*    *Eb*            *Ab*            *Fm*            *Gsus<sup>4</sup>* *G*    *Cm*

Mi - se - ri - cor - des    si - cut    Pa - ter!            Mi - se - ri - cor - des    si - cut    Pa - ter!

## Prayer for Jubilee Year of Mercy

Lord Jesus Christ,  
you have taught us to be merciful  
like the heavenly Father,  
and have told us that whoever sees you sees Him.  
Show us your face and we will be saved.

Your loving gaze freed Zacchaeus and Matthew  
from being enslaved by money;  
the adulteress and Magdalene  
from seeking happiness only in created things;  
made Peter weep after his betrayal,  
and assured Paradise to the repentant thief.  
Let us hear, as if addressed to each one of us,  
the words that you spoke to the Samaritan woman:  
“If you knew the gift of God!”

You are the visible face of the invisible Father,  
of the God who manifests his power  
above all by forgiveness and mercy:  
let the Church be your visible face in the world,  
its Lord risen and glorified.

You willed that your ministers  
would also be clothed in weakness  
in order that they may feel compassion  
for those in ignorance and error:  
let everyone who approaches them feel  
sought after, loved, and forgiven by God.

Send your Spirit  
and consecrate every one of us with its anointing,  
so that the Jubilee of Mercy  
may be a year of grace from the Lord,  
and your Church,  
with renewed enthusiasm,  
may bring good news to the poor,  
proclaim liberty to captives and the oppressed,  
and restore sight to the blind.



We ask this through the intercession of Mary,  
Mother of Mercy,  
you who live and reign with the Father  
and the Holy Spirit  
for ever and ever.

Amen.

# Mercy at the Heart of Francis' Conversion



# Conversion of Francis

- handsome, charming and educated young man
- lived a carefree life, enjoyed “partying” with his friends, dreamed of knighthood and longed for the adventurous life of chivalry



- in pursuit of that dream, he joined in the war between Assisi and Perugia
- Francis fought with youthful enthusiasm; however, he was wounded and taken prisoner
- spent the next year in a dungeon and contracted malaria
- Ransomed by his father, a more reflective Francis returned to Assisi

- however, the military victories of Count Walter of Brienne revived Francis' desire for knighthood - still wanted to become a knight
- on his way to join Brienne, Francis stopped in Spoleto and heard the shocking news of Brienne's death
- overcome by depression, his malaria returned



- While in Spoleto, he had a dream
- In the dream, a mysterious voice asked him, "Who do you think can best reward you, the Master or the servant?"
- Francis answered, "The Master."
- The voice continued, "Then, why do you leave the Master for the servant?"
- Francis realized the servant was Count Walter
- he left Spoleto and returned to Assisi, convinced that God, the Master, had spoken to him





- during the next two years, Francis sensed an inner force that was preparing him for another change

- one day while riding his horse, he came upon a leper. His first impulse was to throw him a coin and spur his horse on. Instead, Francis dismounted and embraced the leper. On his death bed, Francis recalled the encounter as the crowning moment of his conversion:

"What seemed bitter to me was changed into sweetness of soul and body."





We recall that Jesus too had an experience with a leper ...

A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, “If you are willing, you can make me clean.” Jesus was indignant. He reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!” Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed. Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: “See that you don’t tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them.” Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere.

(Mark 1: 40-45)



## Conversion of Francis - Mission Revealed

- Later, in the abandoned Church of San Damiano, he heard a voice coming from the crucifix which challenged him to rebuild the church



- at first, he thought it meant that he should rebuild San Damiano but, gradually, Francis came to realize that God meant that he should "rebuild" the Church at large

“The Lord himself led me among the lepers and used mercy with them.”

In his *Testament*, Saint Francis chose a very precise word – mercy – to indicate the beginning of his conversion

(Pope Francis, *The Name of God is Mercy*)

Who are the lepers who live among us?

How are we called to show them mercy?

Are we able to see our own woundedness and afflictions and, hence, our brotherhood with all?

## Conversion of Francis and Mercy

- Mercy was the first fruit of (Francis') drawing close to the Lord. Let's not forget what St. Francis says in the same phrase; 'the Lord led me among them.'
- Some have come to Christ from love of the poor and there have been others that have come to the poor from the love of Christ. St. Francis belongs to the latter.
- Francis first experienced God's mercy to him, mercy as a free gift, and it is this that spurred him and gave him the strength to have mercy for the leper and the poor.

(Raniero Cantalamessa, OFM Cap)

We must first experience mercy ourselves.  
Then, we can demonstrate mercy towards others  
as a result of our own personal experience of  
mercy. The same was true for Francis - he first  
experienced the mercy of God personally and  
then reached out to others in mercy.



So, let us pray ...

Give us new hearts, O Lord  
Give us new hearts, O Lord.  
Give us hearts of flesh,  
Remove our hearts of stone.

**Heart of Jesus, Heart of Mercy  
(Michael Herry, fms)**

REFRAIN:

Give us new hearts, O Lord.

Give us new hearts, O Lord.

Give us hearts of flesh,

Remove our hearts of stone.

# Franciscan Focus of Mercy

## Mercy in the Life of Francis



# Mercy in the Life of Francis

- Francis' experience of God's mercy in his life
- Francis' mercy toward others
- Francis' mercy towards himself

# Francis' experience of God's mercy in his life

- Brother Leo, Faithful companion of St. Francis, was used by God to be a messenger of His mercy.
- “God the Father, whose mercy is infinitely greater than your sins, will be very merciful to you and will give you many graces.” *The Little Flowers of St. Francis*, Ch. 9 p.61



St. Bonaventure tells us that one of the “divine perfections” that was most clearly reflected in St. Francis was Divine Mercy. He writes ...

“In these latter days, the grace of God our Savior appeared in his servant Francis, and to all who are truly humble and lovers of holy poverty. In him, they can venerate God’s superabundant mercy ...”  
(St. Bonaventure, *The Life of St. Francis*)

If God's mercy is "superabundant", then we should be prepared to "risk God's mercy", and allow him space to transform peoples' lives.

St Bonaventure further writes that "one of the principal intentions of St. Francis's own prayers was pleading for mercy upon the world"

“Though St. Francis exhibited the greatest esteem for all people and rendered each man and woman every possible deference, he looked upon himself as a sinner, considering himself as only one among many sinners.

In fact, he believed himself the greatest of all sinners. He was accustomed to say that if the mercy shown him by God had been given to any other sinner, the latter would have become ten times holier than he, and that to God alone must be attributed whatever was found in him of goodness and beauty, for from God only was it derived.”

*Pope Pius XI - from Rite Expiatis*



# This sounds familiar?

- Reminiscent of Pope Francis when he speaks about his ministry to prisoners in the Name of God is Mercy “Why them and not me? I should be here. I deserve to be here. .... It might seem shocking but I derive consolation from Peter: he betrayed Jesus and even so, he was chosen.”



# Francis' mercy toward others

God's superabundant mercy shared with the three robbers (Ch. 26, P. 100 Little Flowers of St. Francis)

- A friar rebuked the robbers who came looking for food but later apologized to them as Francis instructed and gave them food to eat.
- The robbers have a change of heart as a result of this
- They go to St. Francis who welcomes them and teaches them about God's superabundant mercy
- Through these words and similar teachings, the three robbers renounced their ways. St. Francis received them into the Order, and they began to do great penance.

- Fr. Cantalamessa relates this story of Francis writing to one of the superiors of the Order as a great example of how mercy shone in the life of Francis. “May there be no friar in the world, who has sinned, as much as it is possible to sin, that, after having seen your eyes, does not go away without your forgiveness, if he asks for it; and if he did not ask for forgiveness, you ask him if he wants to be forgiven. And if afterwards he should sin a thousand times before your eyes, love him more than me for this, so that you are able to attract him to the Lord, and always have mercy for such brothers” (*Letter to a Minister* - FF nr. 235).

- Francis experience of Christ's mercy led him to the poor. He was the mirror of Christ for them.
- Chesterton in his biography St. Francis of Assisi writes “ From Pope to the beggar, from the Sultan of Syria ... To the ragged robber, there was never a man who looked into those brown burning eyes without being certain that Francis Bernadone was really interested in him.”

“

Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back.” Luke 6:30

- Francis doesn't wait to be asked!
- He sees any material goods he has to be “on loan” It rightly belongs to the next person who needs it
- Mirror of Perfection cloak stories:
  - \_ How he stripped himself and his companion to provide clothing for a poor old woman
  - How he regarded it as a robbery not give a cloak to one who had greater need
  - How he gave a cloak to poor man on a certain condition

# Friar who was fasting

- One night, we are told, the friary was aroused by the cry "I am dying." "Who are you", exclaimed Francis arising, "and why are dying?" "I am dying of hunger", answered the voice of one who had been too prone to fasting. Whereupon Francis had a table laid out and sat down beside the famished friar, and lest the latter might be ashamed to eat alone, ordered all the other brethren to join in the meal. Mirror of Perfection

# Francis' mercy towards himself

- Poor food, long nights in prayer, harsh living conditions wore his body down
- Francis did not show his own body the mercy extended to the brother in the previous story
- Later in his life in response to a brother who chastised him for being unkind to his body he said, “Rejoice, brother body, and forgive me, for behold, I now gladly fulfil your desires, I hasten to give heed to your complaints.”
- Unfortunately, this show of mercy came too late

- We cannot judge Francis, but he seems to be saying there might have been room for a little more balance in his life
- He seems to be saying that we should have compassion for ourselves as well
- self denial is important but our own bodily needs should come into the picture
- Most of err on the side of being too indulgent



Happy to note that he did order out for cookies on his deathbed from Brother Lady Jacoba!



# Humility and Poverty (Doug Clorey)

We are nothing without God above  
We want nothing but our God alone.  
Humility and poverty,  
Freedom to love.

1. So often we see ourselves  
As the answer to all  
world.  
And yet for all things we have  
mercy  
We depend on our God.

2. Possession and power  
Are the lures of the  
Detachment and  
Is the Rule of our lives.

3. Let us care for each other.  
Let us truly love God.  
As we journey together  
Let us trust in the Lord.