

Become a Model of Christlike Mercy



Christopher News Notes

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE MERCIFUL? How can we draw closer to Christ by imitating His mercy? This concept can be a difficult one for Christians, but it's key to the journey of becoming more like Jesus. Mercy is at the center of many of His parables and lessons in the gospels, so our goal should be understanding how we can become more like Jesus in our expression of this virtue. First, we have to understand the deep mystery that is His mercy.

What is Mercy?

In the original gospels, mercy (*eleos* in Greek) can also be translated as compassion or pity, but without the negative connotations we have in English for pity. It's a feeling of positive emotion—kindness or goodwill towards the afflicted, combined with a desire to help them.

Mercy means to show care for the individual, and it indicates a dimension of forgiveness when referenced in terms of judgment. To give and receive mercy is to recognize that errors may have been done and wrongs committed, that one may stand rightfully condemned, but clemency and compassion override the pull towards harsh judgment, strict retribution, or worse, revenge. It is a central message in the Christian worldview and one from which we all benefit, as our Lord took on the weight of our sins out of merciful compassion. Mercy also encourages forgiveness, which can heal both the victim and the offender. We are called to mirror God's mercy in our lives.

The theme of mercy runs strongly through three of the gospels. When Jesus is asked why He eats with tax collectors and sinners, He answers, "Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners." Those who were blind, crippled, or tormented were thought at the time to be suffering for sins committed by themselves or their ancestors. They called out to Jesus as He passed, "Have mercy on me, Lord!" Recognizing His dominion over the world, these people were asking for healing and restoration, and Jesus answered their cries.

In the Sermon on the Mount, and the sermon on the plain, Christ teaches, "Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy," and He implores His audience, "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful." The parable of the Good Samaritan ends with Jesus asking who, in the story, was a neighbor to the man who had been beaten by robbers? "The one who showed him mercy," the lawyer replied. Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

The mercy of Christ wasn't long-faced and dour,

The Boston Dad Practices Mercy

Daryl Silva is known as "The Boston Dad" on Facebook and Youtube, where he relates funny stories about life and faith with a thick New England accent. He recently recalled a road rage incident that he feels was defused by the Holy Spirit giving him strength and mercy. As Silva was pulling out of a parking lot, a pickup truck taking up two lanes zoomed towards him, with the driver honking his horn and screaming obscenities. Instead of responding the same way, Silva says he felt the Holy Spirit inspire him to lean out his window and say to the angry driver, "Would you like me to buy you a coffee? It seems like you've had a bad day."

Though taken aback, the driver followed Silva into a nearby Dunkin' Donuts parking lot, still wondering if this offer was for real. Silva bought him coffee and started praying with the man, who broke down in tears and started sharing all the troubles in his life. Silva said, "He started letting go of all that was going on in his life, crying, and I started getting teary-eyed. It was amazing. I told him to connect with me on Facebook." Silva concluded his video by saying, "If somebody is acting cruel to you, mean to you, they need that heart of yours. They need God more than anyone. So don't react to their anger. Answer with love."

nor was it a benign neglect or downplaying of a harm—it was warm, welcoming, freely given, fully knowledgeable and fully voluntary. Like the parable of the two debtors, we are invited to offer that same mercy to those around us.

The Divine Mercy

Helen Kowalska (1905-1938), was a Polish nun and mystic whose *Diary* became famous after her death. Known today as St. Maria Faustina Kowalska, she is seen as the great apostle of Divine Mercy. In 1931, St. Faustina had a powerful vision. She saw Jesus clothed in a white garment with His right hand raised in blessing. His left hand was touching His garment in the area of the heart, from where two large rays came forth, one red and the other pale. She gazed intently at the Lord in silence, her soul filled with awe, but also with great joy. In the vision, Jesus said to her: "Paint an image according to the pattern you see, with the signature: Jesus, I trust in You. I promise that the soul that will venerate this image will not perish."

St. Faustina's image of Divine Mercy became venerated throughout the world. The picture of blood and water flowing from Jesus represented God's all-giving mercy. St. Faustina's humble life was dedicated to sharing her visions of Christ's merciful

heart and message of hope. In her diary, she shares that Jesus revealed to her: "Today I am sending you with My mercy to the people of the whole world. I do not want to punish aching mankind, but I desire to heal it, pressing it to My Merciful Heart."

Saints and Guides for Mercy

The stories of saints and holy men and women show a fascinating diversity of the ways in which they imitated Christ's mercy. There are examples such as Damien of Molokai, who lived with and cared for lepers in a colony in Hawaii, or Catherine McAuley, founder of the Sisters of Mercy, who helped educate the poor and care for cholera victims in Dublin, Ireland. They ministered to people who had been rejected by society, and they cared for the poor and suffering with heartfelt compassion. The key to their success was joyfully living out service to others and practicing mercy regularly. Like any other habit, the more you do it, the more it becomes a part of your life.

Showing Mercy in Daily Life

Christian pastor Rick Warren said, "God's mercy to us is the motivation for showing mercy to others. Remember, you will never be asked to forgive someone else more than God has forgiven you."

This 'paying it forward' of mercy is what helps us transform our hearts, and our lives, to be more Christlike. So what does that look like in practice?

Not many people would stop to talk to a mentally ill homeless man, but Ginger Sprouse of Texas did more than just strike up a conversation with Victor Hubbard. She brought him into her home and gave him a job. Ginger, a chef and owner of a catering business in Houston, would see Victor on her way to work every day. As reported by *Aleteia*, she wanted to know why he was always on the same corner. The 32-year-old man told her that he returned to the spot because three years ago his mother dropped him off there, and he was hoping she'd come back. He had been suffering from mental illness and living on the streets.

The *Aleteia* story stated: "Hearing his story, Sprouse's interest in Hubbard spiraled into something greater. Talking to *NBC News*, Sprouse described him as 'kind, loving, and gracious.' She added: 'He didn't ask me for anything. He didn't want anything. He was just excited that I wanted to stop and talk to him.' So over the months, the pair spent more time with each other."

Ginger and her husband brought Victor into their home, and got him medical help. She befriended him, and set him up with a job at her catering business. Victor's life began to improve, and he reconnected with his mother. When it was clear she didn't have the capabilities to help him manage his mental illness, Ginger, her husband, and their two sons made a lifelong commitment to

taking on Victor as their new family member. "If we help him, we cannot just clean him up and give him a shower and throw him out there and say, 'Okay, little bird, fly,'" Ginger said. "I have a deep faith and believe in God. For whatever reason, he was the one the Lord put there on the corner and put in my heart."

Mercy is Healing

Seventeen-year-old Dominik Pettey of Potomac, Maryland, was killed in a car accident when the car he was riding in ran out of gas and was struck from behind. In an interview in *Our Sunday Visitor*, his parents Magdalena and Patrick Pettey said, "Our family has always had a deep devotion to Divine Mercy...There was never any doubt in our minds that it was the merciful Jesus who was carrying us through the devastating death of Dominik. And we came to believe that through Dominik's death, others would experience Divine Mercy."

In front of Dominik's casket, they placed St. Faustina's image of the Divine Mercy. They asked the people gathered for the funeral to practice active mercy and kindness toward one another. They wanted people to share with the world that we have an all-merciful God, and to believe that no sin is too great that it cannot be forgiven. Dominik's parents even reached out to the woman who caused the accident, and met her 11 months later. "We knew that we wanted to forgive the woman who killed our son," Patrick explained to OSV. "She told us that she was suffering, too, and how much our forgiveness has helped her."

"When you don't forgive, you hold onto anger, and it only hurts you more," Magdalena Pettey said. "Our faith in Divine Mercy helped us to forgive—even though we still feel the loss and the sadness of losing our son. But God gives us the grace we need, and when we are open, more graces come to us."


**"It's better to light one candle
than to curse the darkness."**

A non-profit, founded in 1945 by Father James Keller, M.M., The Christophers encourages people to change the world for the better. Donations are tax-deductible. News Notes are published 10 times a year. Single copies are free.

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Christopher News Note 633

ISBN: 8755-69601

"Mercy, according to God's desires, has no limits and in fact, if it is like God's mercy, it embraces everyone."

—St. Vincent de Paul