

Be Not Afraid

Bishop John M. LeVoir's Monthly Column for *The Prairie Catholic*

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Jubilee Year of Mercy: "Merciful like the Father"

On March 13, 2015, Pope Francis announced that there would be an extraordinary holy year. It will be a jubilee year of mercy. The jubilee year of mercy will begin on Dec. 8, 2015, and conclude on Nov. 20, 2016. The motto for the holy year is "Merciful like the Father" ("Misericordiae Vultus," no. 14).

The first time that I discovered the importance of mercy in the Christian life was when I read St. John Paul II's encyclical "Rich in Mercy," which he issued on Nov. 30, 1980.

In that encyclical, the saintly pontiff writes: "Mercy is manifested in its true and proper aspect when it restores to value, promotes and draws good from all the forms of evil existing in the world and in man. Understood in this way, mercy constitutes the fundamental content of the messianic message of Christ and the constitutive power of his mission" ("Rich in Mercy," no. 6). So mercy is not something that is tangential to the mission of Christ and his disciples; it is fundamental.

In his encyclical on mercy, Pope John Paul II comments masterfully on the parable of the prodigal son. He shows how the father of the son restores the value of his son, which had been lost through dissolute living. By forgiving his son, the father promotes and draws good from evil. From the evil of his son's sin, the father draws the good of forgiveness and restoration. The father has mercy on his son.

The father of the prodigal represents God the Father, who is rich in mercy. When we live dissolutely – that is, when we sin – God the Father has mercy on us. Sin makes us prodigals in the spiritual sense. But when we repent and return to God, as the prodigal repented and returned to his father, God's mercy manifests itself in forgiveness. From the evil of our sin, God draws the good of forgiveness and restoration.

"This (merciful) love is able to reach down to every prodigal son (all of us), to every human misery, and above all, to every form of moral misery, to sin. When this happens, the person who is the object of mercy does not feel humiliated, but rather found again and 'restored to value.' The father first and foremost expresses to him his joy that he has been 'found again' and that he has 'returned to life'" ("Rich in Mercy," no. 6).

Pope Francis sees that the world desperately needs the mercy of God. The pope is calling us to be merciful like the Father. He knows that there are so many who are wounded by sin, suffering, sickness, terrorism, and persecution. These people need mercy in order to be "found again," "restored to value," and "returned to life."

That is why in his interview with Antonio Spadaro, SJ, editor in chief of *La Civiltà Cattolica*, Pope Francis said: "I see clearly that the thing the Church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful." It is precisely mercy that heals wounds and warms the hearts of the faithful.

Man and woman: complementary and of the same substance

Almost every Wednesday, Pope Francis has a general audience in which he addresses issues of importance to the Church and to the world. For a number of recent Wednesday audiences, he has been addressing the issue of marriage and the family. For example, he has spoken beautifully about children and grandparents.

On Wednesday, April 22, 2015, the Holy Father gave a short commentary on the second chapter of the Book of Genesis. In this chapter, Adam is created at the culmination of creation, but as a solitary being. God had created a beautiful garden in which this solitary human being could live. All the animals and plants were his. Pope Francis comments: “The Holy Spirit, who inspires all the Bible, suggests for a moment the image of man alone, without woman.”

Going further, Pope Francis states: “And it suggests the thought of God, almost the sentiments of God as he watches him, as he observes Adam alone in the garden: He is free, he is the master, but ... he is alone. And God sees that this is not good; it is a lack of communion, a lack of fullness. ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.’”

So even though Adam has all of the animals and plants to please himself, there is no other creature like himself. Therefore, he experiences a profound loneliness. He longs for another human being who is his equal and with whom he can share his life.

Seeing Adam’s loneliness, from the rib of the sleeping Adam, God creates woman. As Pope Francis says: “When, after presenting all the other creatures, God finally presents woman to Adam, the man joyfully recognizes that creature, and only her, to be part of him: ‘bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.’

“Finally, there is reflection, reciprocity. The woman is not a replica of man; she comes directly from God’s gesture of creation. Indeed, the image of the ‘rib’ does not imply inferiority or subordination, but on the contrary, that man and woman are of the same substance and are complementary. And the fact that, again in the parable, God forms woman while man is sleeping, underlines that she is in no way a creation of man, but of God.”

It is for a reflection such as this that I read what Pope Francis says directly from the Vatican Web site (www.vatican.va). The popular media usually pass over many of Francis’ most beautiful reflections. If we depend only on the popular media, we will miss the fullness of Pope Francis’ profound teaching.

No Tengas Miedo

por Obispo John M. LeVoir

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El Jubileo de la Misericordia: Misericordioso como el Padre

El 13 de Marzo del 2015 el Papa Francisco convocó el Jubileo Extraordinario: Año Santo de la Misericordia. El Jubileo de la Misericordia empezará el 8 de Diciembre, 2015 y concluirá el 20 de Noviembre, 2016. El lema para el año santo es “Misericordioso como el Padre” (“Misericordiae Vultus,” no. 14).

La primera vez que descubrí la importancia de la misericordia en la vida Cristiana fue cuando leí la encíclica de San Juan Pablo II “Rico en Misericordia,” que lo omitió el 30 de Noviembre, 1980. En aquella encíclica el pontífice escribe: La Misericordia se manifiesta en su aspecto verdadero y propio, cuando revalida, promueve y extrae el bien de todas las formas del mal existentes en el mundo y en el hombre. Así entendida, constituye el contenido fundamental del mensaje mesiánico de Cristo y la fuerza constitutiva de su misión.” (“Rich in Mercy,” no. 6). Así que la misericordia no es algo que es tangencial a la misión de Cristo y sus discípulos; es fundamental.

En su encíclica sobre la misericordia, el Papa Juan II comenta con maestría sobre la parábola del hijo pródigo. El muestra cómo el padre del hijo restaura el valor de su hijo, que se había perdido por una vida de derroche y libertinaje. Al perdonar a su hijo, el padre promueve y extrae el bien del mal. De la maldad del pecado de su hijo, el padre atrae el bien del perdón y restauración. El padre tiene misericordia de su hijo.

El padre del hijo pródigo representa al Dios Padre, que es rico en misericordia. Cuando vivimos perdidamente – es decir, cuando pecamos – Dios el Padre tiene piedad de nosotros. El pecado nos hace pródigos en el sentido espiritual. Pero cuando nos arrepentimos y volvemos a Dios, como el hijo pródigo arrepentido y volvió a su padre, la misericordia de Dios se manifiesta en el perdón. Desde el mal de nuestro pecado, Dios atrae el bien del perdón y restauración. “Tal amor (misericordioso) es capaz de inclinarse hacia todo hijo pródigo (todos nosotros), toda miseria humana y singularmente hacia toda miseria moral o pecado. Cuando esto ocurre, el que es objeto de misericordia no se siente humillado, sino como hallado de nuevo y ‘revalorizado.’ El padre, le manifiesta, particularmente, su alegría por haber sido hallado de nuevo y por haber ‘resucitado’” (“Rico en Misericordia,” no. 6).

El Papa Francisco ve que el mundo necesita desesperadamente la misericordia de Dios. El Papa nos pide ser misericordioso como el Padre. El sabe que hay muchos que están heridos por el pecado, el sufrimiento, la enfermedad, el terrorismo y la persecución. Estas personas necesitan la misericordia con el fin de ser “hallado de nuevo,” “revalorizado,” y “haber resucitado.” Por esa razón en su entrevista con Antonio Spadaro, SJ, jefe de redacción de La Civiltà Cattolica, el Papa Francisco dijo: Hoy veo claramente lo que más necesita la Iglesia es la capacidad de curar heridas y mantener el corazón cálido de los feligreses.” La misericordia es precisamente lo que sana las heridas y mantiene el corazón cálido de los fieles.

Hombre y Mujer, de la misma sustancia y complementarios

Casi todos los miércoles, el Papa Francisco da una audiencia general en la que aborda cuestiones de importancia para la Iglesia y para el mundo. Por una serie de recientes audiencias, el ha venido

abordando el tema del matrimonio y la familia. Por ejemplo, el ha hablado muy bien sobre los niños y los abuelos.

El Miércoles, 22 de Abril, 2015 el Santo Padre dio un breve comentario sobre el Segundo capítulo del libro de Génesis.

Para leer más sobre las reflexiones del Papa Francisco vayan directamente al sitio web www.vatican.va, seleccionar el idioma español y para las reflexiones de los miércoles busca “audiencia general.”