



Mercy and the Mother of God

Mary teaches us how to trust in God, receive his grace and share his love with others

by Father Jacques Philippe

EDITOR'S NOTE: The following text is abridged from a homily given Dec. 8, 2015, at Thomas More College in Merrimack, N.H., and later published in a book titled *Real Mercy: Mary, Forgiveness and Trust* (Scepter, 2016). It is reprinted with permission.

As a priest, I often meet people who say, "A few years ago, I committed this great fault, and I went to confession. I think God forgave me, but I don't seem to be able to forgive myself."

Consider asking yourself the question, "What will allow me to access the mercy of God?" My answer is that there are four conditions: trust, humility, gratitude and forgiveness. And Mary, who is the person with the deepest love and knowledge of God, can help us with these.

The mercy of God will always be greater than our sins, and this is what we contemplate in the mystery of the Virgin Mary. She plays a very important role in introducing us to God's mercy, which is his deepest attribute. Mary did not sin, but in the Magnificat she sang of the mercy of God (cf. Lk

1:46-55). God's mercy is a grace given to Mary in advance, by merit of the sacrifice of the cross. The effusion of mercy that springs forth from the cross, from the very heart of Christ, is what purified Mary.

Everything is given and everything comes from the mercy of God, not from our merit but from the free love of God. Mary is the richest of all creatures, the holiest and the most beautiful, but also the humblest and poorest because she knows that she has received everything from God.

TRUST AND HUMILITY

We see in the Gospels that the mercy of God is the greatest mystery and the most beautiful treasure. However, we have a difficult time accepting it because we really have very little trust in God's forgiveness.

This attitude can come about for certain reasons. Perhaps it has to do with human psychology, but without a doubt, there is a lack of trust. We don't really believe in this reality of the forgiveness of God, and so we don't always fully welcome it. God forgives us, but we can't forgive ourselves.

So there is an issue of trust that is not easy for us because of our wounded human nature. Yet we have the witness of the saints, such as St. Thérèse of Lisieux and St. Faustina, who all emphasize the importance of trust. What permits us to access God's mercy? Trust — complete trust in God. The greater the trust, the more mercy will be given to us, and the more we will please God.

St. Thérèse said that what wounds the heart of God most are not our faults but our lack of trust in his love. This is what prevents us from receiving the abundant mercy and love of God.

St. Louis de Montfort writes about everything Mary gives us. She gives us her faith, her trust in God. She dilates our hearts in a filial trust. She takes away every fear from us, along with all our suspicions. She gives us trust and simplicity and a profound faith that enables us to place all of our trust in God.

The second condition is humility. Sometimes, when we don't forgive ourselves even when God forgives us, the reason is pride — I don't accept being a person who has fallen, who has made mistakes. I would have liked to have been the perfect person, infallible. But I've made mistakes, and I can't accept having faults. This stems from a certain form of pride.

We have difficulty accepting that we have to depend on the mercy of God. We would like to save ourselves. We would like to be our own richness — to be rich based on our good actions and qualities. To receive everything from the mercy of God — to accept that God is our source of richness and not ourselves — requires a great poverty of heart.

Sometimes it's good that we rejoice when we have accomplished great things. But in the moments where we feel our poverty, we should also rejoice, because the good news is for the poor. Mercy is for those who need it, who feel profoundly that they cannot save themselves. Our only hope is not through our own works; it's hope in the infinite mercy of God. That is our only security. It's our only security in life to know that the mercy of God will never run out. That's the second condition for welcoming the mercy of God: humility and poverty of heart.

Mary's maternal love helps us to recognize and accept peacefully our limitations and fragility. This is Mary's great gift to us. Close to Mary, we love our littleness. St. Thérèse says this as well: "The more that you love your smallness and your poverty, the more Jesus will give you grace."

GRATITUDE AND FORGIVENESS

There is a third important condition: gratitude. Jesus said in the Gospel, "For to him who has, will more be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away" (Mt 13:12). We can understand it this way: He who knows he has received gifts from God, who

gives thanks for these gifts, will receive more.

There is a little secret in the spiritual life: The more the heart gives thanks, the more God gives, even when life isn't perfect, even when we don't have everything we need or want. The more we thank God, the more our heart is open to receive even more of his mercy and his gifts.

Mary gives us the gift of thanksgiving. Mary is the Virgin of the Magnificat. She sings the marvels and the mercy of God in a song of hope. God will strike down the mighty from their thrones and will raise the humble. When Mary sings this, it is not yet fulfilled: The kings are still sitting on their thrones. Mary's song of hope is a song of gratitude. Mary teaches us the grace of thanksgiving and praise through her Magnificat.

The fourth condition to receive God's mercy abundantly is very clear in the Gospel: If you do not forgive, God cannot forgive you. Sometimes what stops us from receiving the mercy of God is our lack of mercy toward others, our hardness of heart toward others, our lack of goodness toward others. And so we too need to be merciful. "Blessed are the merciful, for mercy will be shown them" (Mt 5:7). The more I'm merciful with my brothers and sisters, the more God will be merciful with me.

If we want to receive mercy, we have to be merciful toward others. Here Mary gives us a beautiful gift: her maternal heart, her merciful heart. She is our mother, and everything she receives from God, she gives to us. The more I give myself to Mary, the more she will give herself to me.

What do we observe about Mary at the wedding at Cana? She's the first one to see the needs of the people around her. There is no more wine; this would be a catastrophe — even worse if this wedding were in France! Mary is the first one to notice, and she goes to find Jesus.

Mary can help us open our hearts and eyes to the needs of our brothers and sisters. She motivates us to acts of love and mercy through her maternal grace. Her tenderness and love has the force of faith. It can be compared to an army ready for battle. She's strong against evil, but with an inner peace and tenderness that she transmits to us.

Let us ask for the grace to welcome Mary into our hearts, to give ourselves to her so she can give us what she has received from God. She will give us limitless trust, faith, humility, hope and thanksgiving, along with her loving and attentive gaze and the goodness that is so deep within her. By practicing all of this with Mary, she will ask for what we need.

MARY GIVES US HER
FAITH, HER TRUST IN
GOD. SHE DILATES
OUR HEARTS IN A
FILIAL TRUST.

FATHER JACQUES PHILIPPE is a member of the Community of the Beatitudes in France and the author of several modern classics in Catholic spirituality, including *Searching for and Maintaining Peace* (2002) and *Interior Freedom* (2007). Visit frjacquesphilippe.com.