

ALLOCUTIO, LEGION OF MARY, MELBOURNE SENATUS, 6 NOVEMBER 2016

Fr. Justin Ford, Senatus Spiritual Director

As the Year of Mercy draws to a close, we give thanks to God for all the blessings received during the Jubilee Year, and we ask Our Lady to protect and multiply the particular graces the Legion has received during that time. In recent months we've been reflecting on the teachings on mercy Pope Francis gave during the Jubilee of Priests in Rome last June, especially his meditation on 'Mary as vessel and source of mercy', so today we conclude those reflections, and sum up the Year of Mercy in the light of Mary.

In his Second Meditation, the Holy Father was referring back to his visit to Mexico earlier in the year, and in particular his visit to the miraculous image of Our Lady of Guadalupe given to St Juan Diego in 1531. He spoke in particular of the 'gaze' of Mary: 'During the moments I was able to spend alone with Mary during my visit to Mexico...I gazed at Our Lady, the Virgin of Guadalupe and I let her gaze at me.'

And he gave this interesting metaphor: 'Mary gazes "by weaving", by finding a way to bring good out of all the things that her people lay at her feet...If we consider how God wove the face and figure of Our Lady of Guadalupe into Juan Diego's cloak, we can prayerfully ponder how he is weaving our soul and the life of the whole Church.'

'They say that it is impossible to see how the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe was "painted"; it seems to have been somehow "imprinted". I like to think that the miracle was not only that the image was imprinted or painted, but that the entire cloak was re-created, transformed from top to bottom. Each thread...was transfigured in its place, and, interwoven with all the others, revealed the face of our Lady, her presence and her surroundings. God's mercy does the same thing. It doesn't "paint" us a pretty face, or airbrush the reality of who we are. Rather, with the very threads of our poverty and sinfulness, interwoven with the Father's love, it so weaves us that our soul is renewed and recovers its true image, the image of Jesus.'

Reflecting on the Pope's words, we can say that once a sinner has been forgiven; once we've opened ourselves to the warmth of God's love and returned to his grace, then even the wounds of our past are transformed. We can look back and see, not primarily our own sinfulness, but an occasion when the glory of God's mercy and love was manifested. And that's something far greater than our sin. In the famous words of St Paul, 'Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.' (*Rom 5:20*) And as St John Paul II taught when he visited Perth, 'Even the memory of our sins does not discourage us any longer, because we realise that God's mercy is greater than our sins and that God's pardon is a proof of his faithful love for us.' (*Address to the Elderly in the care of the Little Sisters of the Poor*, 30<sup>th</sup> November 1986)

All this is a reality already here on this earth, but above all it is completed in heaven. For the redeemed, we'll look back and see how every moment of our journey was woven by God's mercy into the final perfection that he had planned for us from the start. This is the ultimate fulfilment of the words of St Paul: 'To them that love God, all things work together unto good.' (*Rom 8:28*)

So: the mercy of God, channelled in a special way through the merciful gaze of Mary, weaving all things into God's perfect work of art.

Pope Francis then went on to speak of how 'Mary's gaze is one of complete attention. She leaves everything else behind, and is concerned only with the person in front of her. Like a

mother, she is all ears for the child who has something to tell her. As the wonderful Guadalupe tradition teaches us, *la Morenita* treasures the gaze of all those who look to her; she reflects the faces of all who come to her.’ The Pope then applied this especially to the ministry of the priests whom he was addressing, but we can also apply it to our own mission as legionaries. He said: ‘There is something unique in the face of every person who comes to us looking for God. We need to realise this, to open our hearts and to show concern for them. Only a Church capable of attentive concern for all those who knock on her door can speak to them of God. Unless we can see into people’s suffering and recognise their needs, we will have nothing to offer them. The riches we possess only flow forth when we truly encounter the needs of others...’

The Holy Father concluded, and we will conclude the Year of Mercy, with a reflection on the *Salve Regina*, that greets Mary as ‘Mother of Mercy’. ‘The words of this prayer’, Pope Francis said, ‘are vibrant with the mystery of the Magnificat. Mary is the Mother of mercy, our life, our sweetness and our hope. Her eyes of mercy are surely the greatest vessel of mercy, for their gaze enables us to drink in that kindness and goodness for which we hunger with a yearning that a look of love alone can satisfy. Her eyes of mercy also enable us to see God’s mercy at work in human history and to find Jesus in the faces of our brothers and sisters.’

‘In Mary, we catch a glimpse of the promised land – the Kingdom of mercy established by our Lord – already present in this life beyond the exile into which sin leads us. From her hand and beneath her gaze, we can joyfully proclaim the greatness of the Lord. With Mary we can say: My soul sings of you, Lord, for you have looked with favour on the lowliness and humility of your servant. How blessed I am, to have been forgiven. Your mercy, Lord, that you showed to your saints and to all your faithful people, you have also shown to me. I was lost, seeking only myself, in the arrogance of my heart, yet I found no glory. My only glory is that your Mother has embraced me, covered me with her mantle, and drawn me to her heart.’