



Launch of Project Compassion 2018

HOMILY

**By the Most Rev Timothy Costelloe SDB
Archbishop of Perth**

Newman Catholic College, Empire Ave, Churchlands
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I don't know how many of you will remember this but two years ago, in 2016, Pope Francis called the whole Catholic Church throughout the world to celebrate what he called a "Jubilee Year of Mercy". In doing this what the Pope was trying to do was to remind all of us that the idea of mercy, and especially God's mercy, is actually at the heart of our Catholic and of all Christian faiths. I think he was also hinting, by the way, that mercy is at the heart of most if not all the world's great religions. That is certainly true of the Jewish faith, from which our Christian faith springs, and also of Islam, which speak of God as the all-merciful one.

It is not my role as the Archbishop of Perth to speak for other religions but I can certainly speak for our Catholic faith when I say that for us mercy is not simply a nice idea but also, and very importantly, a task, a challenge and an invitation. In fact, as Pope Francis reminds us, in our Christian faith Jesus, who is not just a great figure from history but actually the presence of God among us, comes to us in order to reveal the face of God the Father. And what does Pope Francis say about this? He says that Jesus is the face of the Father's mercy.

What this means is that if we want to know what mercy looks like – if we want to know what this challenge and this invitation is to us who call ourselves disciples of Jesus - then we will need to keep our eyes and ears fixed on Jesus, listening to his words and watching him in action.

Today's gospel is a good example of the value of listening to and thinking about the words of Jesus. He talks about the birds of the air and the flowers in the fields, fed by God and clothed in beauty. And then he reminds us of how much more important to God we are and how generous God is in providing for the people he has created, the people he loves.

But this is the challenging part. God prefers more often than not to work through us to share his goodness with his people. Even more strongly we might say that God has, in a certain sense, bound himself to us, so that if we do respond to God then his people will have all that they need – but if we do not respond then God's beloved people will endure loneliness, hunger, discrimination and despair, not because God does not love them enough but because we do not love them enough. And if we do not love them enough, perhaps it is because we do not love God enough – not enough to care about the things, the people, God cares about.

In one of the letters of Saint John, the writer puts this very plainly: how can you say you love God, whom you cannot see, if you do not love your brothers and sisters whom you can see?



As well as listening to the words of Jesus it is also important to watch Jesus in action and we do this of course by getting to know the Gospels as well as we can. Those of you who do know even a little of the story of Jesus will know that almost without exception Jesus approaches people with great gentleness, compassion, generosity and sensitivity. I say “almost without exception” because there is one group of people with whom Jesus is very severe: the religious leaders of Jesus’ time, or at least some of them. And why was Jesus so hard on them? Because, he said, they did not practice what they preached. On one occasion in fact he described them as “whited sepulchres” – graves, that is, which looked beautiful and pure on the outside but were full of dead bones within.

We don’t have time this morning to consider any of the large number of stories in the gospels which show Jesus in action. Perhaps you might ask your RE teachers to help you discover some of them and delve into them to see exactly what Pope Francis was talking about when he described Jesus as the face of the Father’s mercy.

And if you do you will see what mercy looks like. It is as I said a moment ago, generous and gentle, forgiving, encouraging and courageous. It is ready to believe that people can change, including us, and that people’s lives can be better. It is ready to let go of angry or rash judgments, and a desire to too easily blame people for their difficult circumstances or for their mistakes. If I had to sum it up in one word I would say that mercy is about being large-hearted. All of the gospel stories I am referring to show us what mercy looks like in practice and help us to understand that this is the way God always deals with us. We might say, in human terms, that our God is a large-hearted God.

This morning then I want to offer you, and through you your own particular College communities, a challenge. By becoming involved in Project Compassion, by turning your eyes away from yourselves and on to those, both here in Australia but in a particular way those who do not have the advantages we in Australia have, can you show yourselves to be large-hearted people – generous, compassionate, encouraging and courageous? If you can then, just like Jesus himself, you together will also be the face of the Father’s mercy.