

THE PARABLES OF

mercy



A YEAR OF MERCY ACTIVITY



As we enter this Holy Year of Mercy, these Parables of Mercy present us with an invitation to reflect on the overwhelming mercy of God.

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Through the paintings and photographs presented, we are given a visual meditation on some of the parables Jesus used to portray God's mercy. Included are two images that are not parables – the Washing of the Feet and Pope Francis: a Prophet of Mercy. These are provided to deepen our reflection on mercy in action.

You are invited to take some time to pray with these images, alone or in a group, and allow them to speak to your own experience of the mercy of God.

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The Parable of the Lost Coin



'The Lost Coin' by Eugene Burnand

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‘Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbours, saying, “Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.” Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.’

LUKE 15: 8 – 10

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Reflecting on the image

In this parable, Jesus uses the image of a woman to portray God’s mercy. The coin she lost, a drachma, was the equivalent of a day’s wage. So, as small as this coin might seem, it was very precious and held a great value for her. In this image, the woman is announcing her good news to the neighbourhood. Her face reveals something of the exhaustion and intensity of the search she had undertaken, as well as the relief and joy she feels at having found what was lost.

Spend some time with this image and begin to relate it to your own life. When have you felt lost or in a dark place? When have you experienced the mercy of God ‘sweeping’ you out of that dark corner?

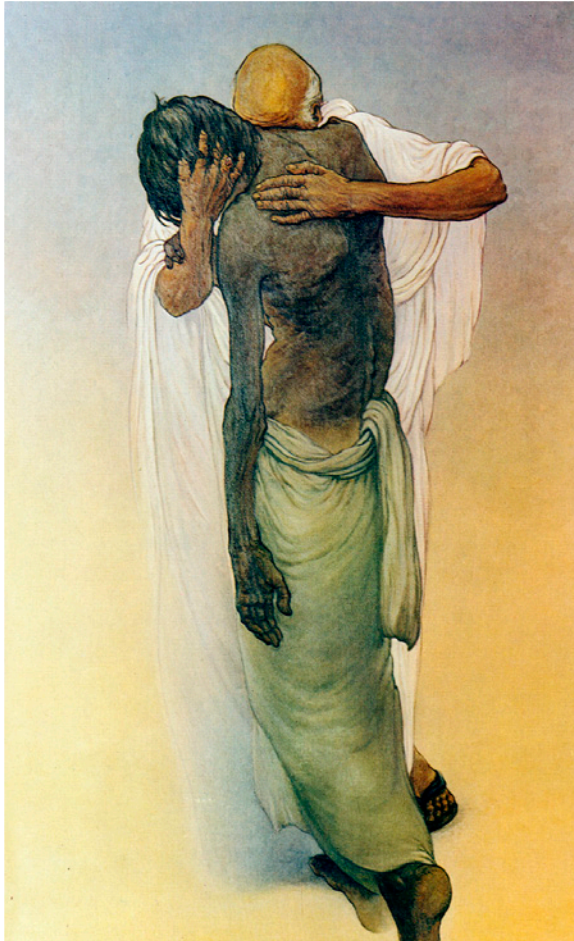
Praying with the image

Ponder these words as an expression of God’s loving mercy:

Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. Because you are precious in my sight, and honoured, and I love you.

—ISAIAH 43:1—2, 4

The Parable of the Prodigal Son



'Forgiving Father' by Frank Wesley

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I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.'” So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him.

LUKE 15: 18 – 20

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Reflecting on the image

In this parable, Jesus uses the image of a father's love to illustrate God's mercy. The human bond between a father and son is one that reaches deep into the heart. It's a love that is often beyond words.

In this image, the son that was 'lost' has begun to turn his life around. From his place of deepest darkness and shame, he returns to the embrace of his father's love.

Spend some time with this image and begin to relate it to your own

life. Look at the father's hands, as the son collapses into his arms, and see the unconditional warmth of his embrace. Recognise the patience and mercy in the figure of the father. When have you experienced such mercy?

Praying with the image

Pray the following from the official Prayer for the Year of Mercy:

Send your Spirit and consecrate every one of us with its anointing, so that the Jubilee of Mercy may be a year of grace from the Lord,

and your Church, with renewed enthusiasm, may bring good news to the poor, proclaim liberty to captives and the oppressed, and restore sight to the blind.

—POPE FRANCIS

The Parable of the 'Lost Sheep'



'Blue Prodigal' by Charlie Mackesy

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And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbours, saying to them, “Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.” Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who need no repentance.

LUKE 15: 6-7

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Reflecting on the image

In this parable, Jesus invites his listeners to reflect on God's mercy for the 'lost'. Using the image of a single lost sheep from a flock of one hundred, he skilfully illustrates God's loving and persevering search for those who have lost their way or who have made a mess of their lives. In this image we see a parent carrying a 'lost daughter', one who has made a mess of her life and who is in need of the embrace of forgiveness, tenderness and mercy.

Spend some time with this image and begin to relate it to your own life. When have you been invited to embrace and forgive someone who has lost their way? How has your life revealed the tenderness of God's mercy?

Praying with the image

Ponder these words as an expression of the tenderness of God's mercy:

*The more I called them, the more they went from me;
... Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them up
in my arms; but they did not know that I healed them. I led
them with cords of human kindness, with bands of love.
I was to them like those who lift infants to their cheeks.
I bent down to them and fed them.*

—HOSEA 11: 2, 3—4

The Parable of the Yeast



'A Little Leaven' by James B. Janknegt

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He told them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.'

MATTHEW 13: 33

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Reflecting on the image

In this parable of the Kingdom of God, Jesus uses a homely image of a woman mixing yeast into flour. Parables always have a surprising element, and in this one it is the quantity of flour used. Three 'measures' would have made enough bread for the woman to feed her entire village. This parable urges us to be mindful of the common good and it illustrates our mission to feed the hungry and show mercy toward all people.

Spend some time observing this woman as an image of God's mercy. How do you relate to her gentle generosity? How is your own life a reflection of the quiet work of God's mercy?

Praying with the image

Listen to or sing the words of the hymn, 'Bring Forth the Kingdom' as an expression of the overwhelming generosity of God's mercy:

*Bring forth the kingdom of mercy,
bring forth the kingdom of peace;
Bring forth the kingdom of justice,
bring forth the City of God.*

The Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard



Photo by Nick Elias

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"These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat." But he replied to one of them, "Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?" So the last will be first, and the first will be last.'

MATTHEW 20: 12–16

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Reflecting on the image

This parable portrays God's mercy for the latecomers who are the very last to arrive at the vineyard. Jesus uses the image of a landowner whose generosity reaches out to those who have been unemployed and overlooked all day and who have managed just one hour's work in the vineyard at the end of the day.

Spend some time with this image. Mindful that the vineyard is a biblical image for the chosen people of God, who might the latecomers represent? How might this parable relate to our attitude toward asylum seekers and refugees?

Praying with the image

Reflect on the gift of love in the following words from St Paul:

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

—1 COR 13: 4–7

The Parable of the Good Samaritan



'The Good Samaritan' by Vincent Van Gogh

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But a Samaritan while travelling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, “Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.”

LUKE 10: 33–35

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Reflecting on the image

In this parable Jesus uses the image of a foreigner to illustrate what mercy truly means. The neighbours we are commanded to love, and show mercy toward, include those who are not of our own faith or nationality, and who may even be our enemies.

Spend some time with this image by Vincent Van Gogh. Observe how the sky is being torn apart by the power of this story. Observe the effort the Samaritan is putting into aiding the wounded man. Observe that, although traditional enemies, the two men are physically intertwined as human beings. How does this image challenge me to show or to receive mercy?

Praying with the image

Reflect on the quality of mercy in the following words from Shakespeare:

*The quality of mercy is not strain'd.
It droppeth as the gentle rain
from heaven
Upon the place beneath.
It is twice blest:
It blesseth him that gives,
and him that takes.*

The Washing of the Feet



© Sieger Köder, Fußwaschung

Reflecting on the image

This is not one of Jesus' parables but, in a sense, it is like a parable. It calls us to be like the little ones of the gospel, to be a servant and not one who lords it over others. Jesus uses this gesture of humility to teach us that we are to serve one another.

Spend some time with this image observing the humility of Jesus as he stoops and kneels down to wash Peter's feet. Observe Jesus' head bent over the bowl of water, and his face reflected there with Peter's feet. Have you been blessed with the gift of humility to wash others'

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After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, ‘Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.

JOHN 13: 12–15

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feet? Have you accepted the tender gift of others as they washed your feet? Reflect on life's reality of illness and incapacity, on those who are called to be carers and whose lives are truly a reflection of the mercy of God.

Praying with the image

Listen to or sing *The Servant Song* as you contemplate the image:

*Will you let me be your servant;
Let me be as Christ to you?
Pray that I may have the grace to
let you be my servant too.*

Pope Francis: A Prophet of Mercy



CNS photo/Paul Haring

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Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. ‘Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.’

LUKE 6: 36–40

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Reflecting on the image

In this image Pope Francis embraces a blind woman. For Pope Francis ‘Mercy’ is one of the names of God. Mercy is a key to his spirituality, his papacy, his entire life. Many of the images we see of Pope Francis show him embracing God’s little ones — the elderly, children, those with disabilities.

Spend some time with this image observing the tenderness of Pope Francis toward this blind woman. See how his hands hold her gently and with compassion. Observe his face and his own closed eyes, as he quietly prays for this young woman. See the radiant joy on her face as she receives his embrace, his mercy and his prayer.

Praying with the image

Pray the following from the official Prayer for the Year of Mercy:

Send your Spirit and consecrate every one of us with its anointing, so that the Jubilee of Mercy may be a year of grace from the Lord, and your Church, with renewed enthusiasm, may bring good news to the poor, proclaim liberty to captives and the oppressed, and restore sight to the blind.

—POPE FRANCIS

Our thanks



Acknowledgements

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'*The Lost Coin*' by Eugene Burnand
Image provided by Doug Jenkinson, on behalf of the Eugene Burnand Museum (Moudon, Switzerland)
www.eugene-burnand.com

'*Forgiving Father*' by Frank Wesley
www.frankwesleyart.com

'*Prodigal Daughter*' by Charlie Macksey
www.charliemackesy.com

'*A Little Leaven*' by James B. Janknegt
www.bcartfarm.com

'*Migrant workers harvesting Cabernet Sauvignon wine grapes at Vineyard 29*' by Nick Elias
www.waterpear.com

'*The Good Samaritan*' (1890) by Vincent Van Gogh
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'*The Washing of Feet*' by Sieger Köder
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'*Pope Francis & Young Woman*'
CNS photo/Paul Haring

For more information on the Year of Mercy

Official Jubilee of Mercy website
www.iubilaeummisericordiae.va

Archbishop's Office for Evangelisation
www.cam.org.au/evangelisation

To borrow this resource

The *Parables of Mercy* is a travelling resource that is available to borrow free-of-charge by parishes and schools. It consists of eight A1-size images (594 x 841 mm) that can be displayed or mounted. This activity is especially useful for reflection days, retreats and parish missions.

Contact the Archbishop's Office for Evangelisation for more information: (03) 9926 5761 or evangelisation@cam.org.au.



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