

Challenged to Believe in God's Mercy

Introduction

Being a Christian means listening for and responding to Christ's 'call' in our lives. Cultivating space to listen deeply to the stirring of our hearts, where God dwells, is a challenge when there are so many things competing for our attention. This is God's invitation to us. It is a challenge for us to believe and be present to God in conversation. Faith encourages us to apply the example of Jesus to our own lives. In relationship with Christ it is up to us to listen, respond and seek ways to show mercy in the world.

Keywords

**MERCY RESPOND VOCATION CHALLENGE
NUISANCE COMPASSION**

Stimulus

The dictionary defines mercy as 'compassion or forgiveness shown towards someone whom it is within one's power to punish or harm'. Consider the following questions:

- Were there any moments in your life when you had the power to punish, harm or ignore someone but chose not to?
- Were there moments when others showed you compassion?

Jesus offers an example of compassion in his dealings with others. Divide the class into six groups. Offer the groups an example of Jesus' mercy in the Gospels and invite them to paraphrase them in modern language.

- Matthew 11:28-30
- Luke 7:13
- Matthew 15:32
- Mark 6:34
- Luke 19:41-42
- John 18:8-9

Mercy is, in effect, the word given to an action motivated by love and compassion





Watch the following short clip

www.youtube.com/watch?v=2mTLO2F_ERY

Mr W is a man whose life suddenly blossoms through an encounter with a person who accepts him as he is. From being a maladjusted nuisance, he becomes someone who contributes positively to the human community. The loving gaze of another person frees his beauty and humanity from their prison. Mercy, compassion and love are given expression through how we look upon each other, the community and the world around us. Jesus gives us many examples of how the loving gaze transforms an encounter. In essence, it is not what you see but how you view it that alters the vision. (Source seeingmore.org)



Reflective Exercise

In your personal journal, answer the following questions. Try not to rush the answers, but sit with them for a few moments and see what emerges.

- What does the word 'mercy' mean to me?
- If you were to ask Jesus one question about mercy what would it be?
- Do you think mercy and compassion are the same? Explain.
- Do you experience any struggles in believing God's love surrounds you?
- Where can you identify the loving gaze of God's love and compassion in your life?

Prayer

Eyes Open to God's Love

Help me to see as you see, Lord, the dignity in every being. Inspire me to act as you did, Lord, with compassion towards those ignored. Free me to love as you do, Lord, without counting the cost. Amen.





Challenged to Live God's Mercy

Introduction

Now more than ever, images play a vital role in how we communicate. Daily we are faced with images that endorse or challenge our way of being in the world. Our lives are interrupted by images of beauty or of suffering – things we want to see and things we turn our heads from seeing. Consider the current refugee crisis in Europe. Images flooded our screens for a few weeks and then petered out as the news story faded. What would an image of mercy look like in this instance?

Keywords

**REFUGEE ASYLUM SEEKER ECONOMIC MIGRANT
EMPATHY ADVOCACY ACCOMPANIMENT SERVICE**

Stimulus

The theme chosen by the pope for the Church's World Day of Migrants and Refugees (17 January 2016) is **Migrants and Refugees Challenge Us. The Response of the Gospel of Mercy.**

'In our time, migration is growing worldwide. Refugees and people fleeing from their homes challenge individuals and communities, and their traditional ways of life; at times they upset the cultural and social horizons which they encounter,' the pope writes. He goes on: 'Migration movements are now a structural reality, and our primary issue must be to deal with the present emergency phase by providing programmes which address the causes of migration and the changes it entails, including its effect on the makeup of societies and peoples.' The pope asks: 'Faced with these issues, how can the Church fail to be inspired by the example and words of Jesus Christ? The answer of the Gospel is mercy.'

*It is difficult to show mercy
without first developing empathy.*





Watch the following clip and write your initial response in your journal.

'When You Don't Exist'

www.youtube.com/watch?v=_OUpsWCvE38

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus called us to mercy (Mt 5:7) and forgiveness (Mt 6:12).

In fact, he made our reception of mercy and forgiveness from God conditional on our expression of mercy and forgiveness to others.

Consider for a moment how the current refugee crisis has challenged you to express mercy.





The *Jesuit Refugee Service* was established in 1980 and began its operations in Ireland in 2002. Their mission is to accompany, to serve and to advocate the cause of refugees and forcibly displaced persons worldwide. JRS programmes are found in over fifty countries, providing assistance to refugees in camps, to people displaced within their own country, to asylum seekers in cities, and those in detention.

JRS Ireland accompanies individuals, families and children in their journey through the Irish asylum system. For the majority, the journey to get a final determination of their claim for protection from the Irish State will take years. Since 2002, JRS Ireland has been accompanying and serving asylum seekers residing in state-provided accommodation, known as direct provision centres. Currently, JRS Ireland provides outreach and support to residents in eleven direct provision centres.

A key aspect of **accompaniment** is seeking to ensure the dignity of each resident is respected. In particular, JRS gives priority to those whose needs are greatest. Outreach ensures that asylum seekers in direct provision centres have somebody to speak to and that their story and needs can be heard.

JRS Ireland **advocates** to bring about positive structural change within the Irish asylum and immigration system that directly benefits asylum seekers, refugees and the forcibly displaced. JRS also advocates at the regional and international levels to both address the immediate needs of displaced persons, and to improve the policies and procedures applied to those individuals and groups seeking international protection.

At every level, JRS advocacy is linked to, and dependent upon, the knowledge and understanding that comes from a close relationship with asylum seekers themselves. The main issues that JRS works on in Ireland are: asylum and migration; detention; integration; legislative reform and racism.

*Living God's mercy we are called to take
the example of Christ and to serve.*



Direct service enables us to show mercy directly to individuals, to reach out in love and respond directly to human need.

Indirect service projects often include raising money for an organization that serves others. Collecting goods and sending them to an organisation for distribution is another example of indirect service.

Service through advocacy involves beginning to understand the complexity of an issue and suggesting ways to develop support for it. It could involve awareness-raising, writing letters to newspaper editors, politicians or businesses, or speaking out about an issue. This is a powerful witness. By reaching out in love to others we are challenging unjust structures.



REFLECT

Reflective Exercise

1. How does the refugee crisis challenge us to live God's mercy?
2. Consider the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5–7) and the paraphrased poster. What words or phrases speak to you from these texts. Would you have paraphrased differently?
3. An 'image of mercy' is a powerful concept to consider. Describe in detail your 'image of mercy'. How does this inform your way of being in the world?
4. How do the models of service apply to your life? Consider those marginalised by the current refugee crisis. How might you serve, through advocacy, those you may never meet?

Prayer

Challenge us always, Lord, to respond with compassion to those on the margins. Inspire clarity as we grapple with complex issues. Encourage commitment to the cause of justice, through your example. Amen.





Challenged to Receive God's Mercy

Introduction

Jesus is the 'face of God's mercy'. His ministry takes him out among the blind, the lame and the lepers. He crosses the Sea of Galilee to bring good news to those who are on the other side. He sits down with sinners. He is the shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine sheep and goes off in search of the one stray. In all of these ways he reminds us, time and time again, that nobody is outside the mercy of God. How many thousands of people have listened to his Parable of the Prodigal Son and remembered the face of a loving God?

Keywords

FORGIVENESS CONFESION GRATITUDE
SACRAMENT GRACIOUSNESS CONFESSOR

Stimulus

Many Catholics struggle with the mercy in reconciliation. It is sometimes difficult to appreciate the unique healing gift of confession. We sometimes forget this sacrament is a sacrament of healing.

Below is a reflection on the sacrament from Pope Francis speaking on 11 December 2013 in St Peter's square.

Everyone say to himself: When was the last time I went to confession?' And if it has been a long time, don't lose another day. Go, the priest will be good. And Jesus will be there, and Jesus is better than the priest, Jesus receives you. He will receive you with so much love! Be courageous, and go to confession.

Forgiveness is not the result of our efforts, but is a gift. It is a gift of the Holy Spirit who showers us with mercy and grace that pours forth unceasingly from the open heart of Christ crucified and risen.

Don't be afraid of confession, When someone is in line for confession (s)he feels all these things – even shame – but then when he finishes confessing, (s)he leaves feeling free, great, beautiful, forgiving, clean and happy.



Take a look at the following clip

www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qt3zSyDWuW8





What Happens in the Sacrament of Reconciliation?

Before celebrating the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, Catholics prepare with an examination of conscience.

An Examination of Conscience

An examination of conscience is the act of looking prayerfully into our hearts to ask how we have hurt our relationships with God and other people through our thoughts, words and actions. We reflect on the Ten Commandments and the teachings of the Church. The questions below help us in our examination of conscience.

My Relationship with God

- What steps am I taking to help me grow closer to God and to others?
- Do I turn to God often during the day, especially when I am tempted?
- Do I use God's name and the names of Jesus, Mary, and the saints with love and reverence?

My Relationships with Family, Friends and Neighbours

- Have I set a bad example through my words or actions?
- Do I treat others fairly? Do I spread stories that hurt other people?
- Am I loving of those in my family? Am I respectful of my neighbours, my friends, and those in authority?
- Do I show respect for my body and for the bodies of others? Do I keep away from forms of entertainment that do not respect God's gift of sexuality?
- Have I taken or damaged anything that did not belong to me? Have I cheated, copied homework or lied?
- Do I quarrel with others just so I can get my own way? Do I insult others to try to make them think they are less than I am? Do I hold grudges and try to hurt people who I think have hurt me?

Source: Loyola Press



The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation Includes the Following Steps:

- 1) **Introduction.** When you come before the priest, begin by making the **Sign of the Cross** (praying the words out loud), and continue by saying, '**Bless me, Father, I have sinned. It has been (*how long*) since my last confession. These are my sins ...**'
- 2) **Confession.** List the sins you committed before you came to confession. List the sins you have committed that came to mind when doing your examination of conscience. **Don't be too general** (like, 'I haven't been a good person'), but a lot of **detail is not necessary** either (you don't need to tell the whole story of how a sin came about). If you're not sure if something is a sin is, just ask the priest. This isn't counselling, so unless you ask, the priest likely won't give you advice. He'll just move on to ...
- 3) **Penance.** The priest will suggest **something for you to do or pray** as a response to God's mercy. You'll have to remember what this is and do it after the confession is over, so pay attention.
- 4) **Contrition.** The priest will then ask you to pray your 'Act of Contrition', demonstrating your sorrow for your sins. This needs to be prayed out loud for the priest to hear, but need not adhere exactly to one formula. Here are two examples (choose the one that suits you best):

Act of Contrition

My God, I am sorry for my sins with all my heart.
In choosing to do wrong and failing to do good,
I have sinned against You whom I should love
above all things. I firmly intend, with your help,
to do penance, to sin no more, and
to avoid whatever leads me to sin.
Our Saviour Jesus Christ suffered and died for us.
In his name, my God, have mercy.

OR:

O my God, I am heartily sorry
for having offended you and I detest all my sins,
because I dread the loss of heaven and the pains of hell;
but most of all because they offend you, my God,
who are all good and deserving of all my love.
I firmly resolve with the help of your grace,
to confess my sins, to do penance, and to amend my life. Amen.

- 5) **Absolution.** Don't get up to leave after that prayer, because the best part is yet to come: the priest will extend his hands in your direction and he will pray the **Prayer of Absolution**: *God, the Father of Mercies, through the death and resurrection of his Son, has reconciled the world to himself and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins. Through the ministry of the Church, may God grant you pardon and peace. And I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.* **You respond: Amen.**
- 6) **Conclusion.** The priest will then likely say something like, 'God has freed you from your sin. Go in Peace.' To which you can respond: **Thanks be to God.**

After You Leave ...

Don't forget to **do your penance**. If it is saying certain prayers, it's best to do it right away in the church before you forget.

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REFLECT

Reflective Exercise

1. There are many ways in which this sacrament is an exercise in healing. Write a paragraph to explain this to a ten-year-old.
2. Do you experience resistance to the sacrament of healing?
3. Look at the Act of Contrition. What is the prayer really saying?

Prayer

Lord, hold me in your love. Inspire me to receive with an open heart your healing. Guide me in my relationships to be a force for good in the world. Amen.

