

## Reflecting on Mercy

This great Jubilee of Mercy has brought many beautiful ways to remember and to celebrate God's mercy. On October 8<sup>th</sup> our Archdiocese will have a special event to honor Mary as the Mother of Mercy. We will be gathering at St. Bartholomew Church in Columbus, Indiana to deepen our understanding of Mary's extraordinary witness of mercy. Dr. Scott Hahn will be our keynote speaker and throughout the morning we will participate in prayers and music as we honor the Blessed Virgin Mary. While events like our Marian celebration are wonderful opportunities to reflect on God's mercy perhaps that reflection is something we should be doing on a regular basis.

As we read the Gospels, it seems that Jesus never tired of showing mercy. We witness that in His compassion to Nicodemus, in His encounter with the woman caught in adultery, and perhaps most beautifully in His response to the repentant thief on Calvary. But Jesus did not just shower these individuals with mercy; He showers all of us with mercy. Like the old hymn goes "there is wideness in God's mercy." Clearly that message of mercy has been very important to Pope Francis since his election. So of late, I have been reflecting on the many ways God showers you and me with mercy.

Most often that mercy comes to us through people. Perhaps that is most evident when we think of all the people who put up with us and love us in spite of our shortcomings. I am so grateful to my family and friends, not only because they love me, but because with their help I am better able to laugh at myself and my mistakes. Most importantly they are willing to forgive me when I am hurtful and insensitive.

In the midst of our family and friends we are often our best but at times they also experience us at our worst. At those times when they take us as we are and when they are willing to forgive us, surely we are touched by mercy. Similarly we remember that God takes us at our best but also at our worst. And if we are willing to humble ourselves and come to Him in the Sacrament of Confession, we find that He is always ready to embrace us with His mercy.

Through that experience of mercy which is extended to us by God and others, something important can gradually take place within us. And that something is conversion. I have come to see that conversion grows out of our encounters and experiences with mercy. When we are received with mercy our hearts are softened. In the presence of mercy we are better able to examine ourselves with honesty. Thus we are better able to see our shortcomings, failures and growing edges. However, in the presence of mercy we can take one more step – we can try and change. This, if you think about it, is what conversion is all about. Yes, conversion is about change and most importantly a change of heart.

That change of heart and the process of conversion are rarely instantaneous. For most of us they are a process and part of our work this side of heaven. We do not magically become new people, with all our old shortcomings left behind. Conversion is much more subtle and more revealing of God's mercy. In the process of a change of heart, our weaknesses do not vanish but rather become transformed. In the presence of God's mercy we can become better – not perfect – but better.

As we continue through this great Jubilee hopefully our experiences of mercy will help each of us to grow and change. Perhaps that will be one of the greatest blessings of this wonderful Jubilee year.