



Let us go out to meet Jesus.
He opens the gate to happiness for us!

Jesus and the woman caught in adultery

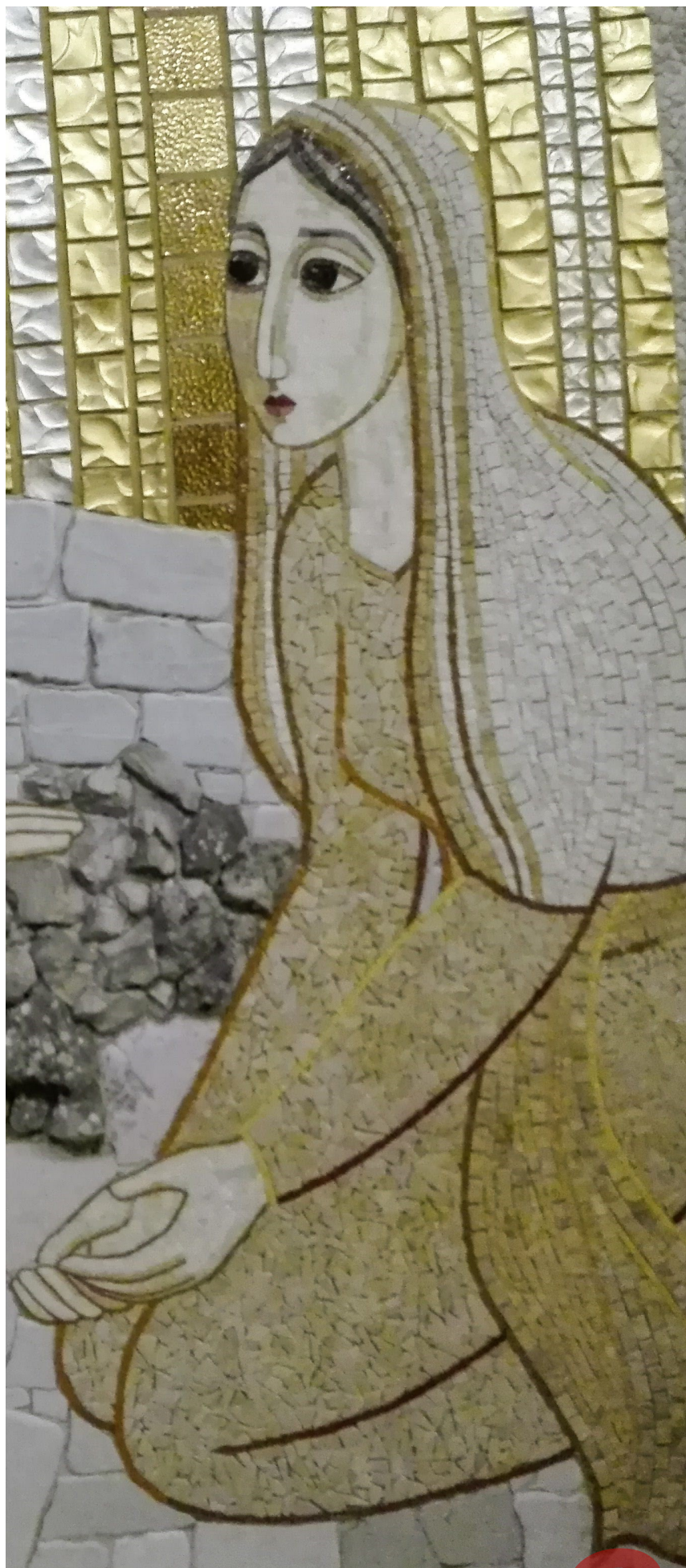
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There is a duplicity in the Pharisees. The law is partial. In principle, they should bring the man and the woman before Jesus. The woman is not an adulteress alone. They let the man leave and only brought the woman to be condemned to death.

Where did the adulterous man go? If the woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery, we could well believe that she was not alone. However, only a woman is brought before Jesus. Where did the adulterous man go? It is as if Jesus Himself stands in his

stead. Our Gospel passage places Him in the scene in the middle of the accusers ready to stone, as it were, both of them for adultery, the woman and Jesus: the woman, of course, the eponymous woman about whom we know only the sin with which she is identified, “the woman caught in adultery,” but also Jesus who, suspected of wanting to betray the law, finds Himself in the position of the accused. He takes upon Himself the sin of the world, all the sins, the very mystery of sin. [...]

He bends down and straightens back up, giving everyone more depth and height, making them enter deep into themselves and thus opening them to God. A beautiful lesson of humanity! In short, whether in His relationship with the woman or her accusers, Jesus presents Himself to us as true God and true man: contemplate Jesus in the depths of His humanity and His saving act. [...]





There is a peculiar aspect to this Beatitude. It is the only one in which the cause and the fruit of happiness coincide: mercy. Those who show mercy will find mercy, they will be “shown mercy.”

This theme of reciprocity of forgiveness is not found only in this Beatitude, but is recurrent throughout the Gospel. How could it be otherwise? Mercy is the very heart of God! Jesus says: “Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive and you will be forgiven” (Lk 6:37). It is always the same reciprocity. And the Letter of James states that “mercy triumphs over judgment” (Jam 2:13).

But it is above all in the Lord's Prayer that we pray: “forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors” (Mt 6:12); and this question is taken up again at the end: “For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your



trespasses” (Mt 6:14-15; cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2838).

There are two things that cannot be separated: forgiveness granted and forgiveness received. However, many people struggle; they cannot forgive. Often the harm received is so great that being able to forgive feels like climbing a very high mountain: an enormous effort; and one thinks: it cannot be done, this cannot be done.

This fact of the reciprocity of mercy shows that we have to reverse our perspective. We cannot do this alone. We need God’s grace, we must ask for it. Indeed, if the fifth Beatitude promises mercy, and in the “Lord’s Prayer” we ask for the

forgiveness of debts, it means that we are essentially debtors and we need to find mercy!

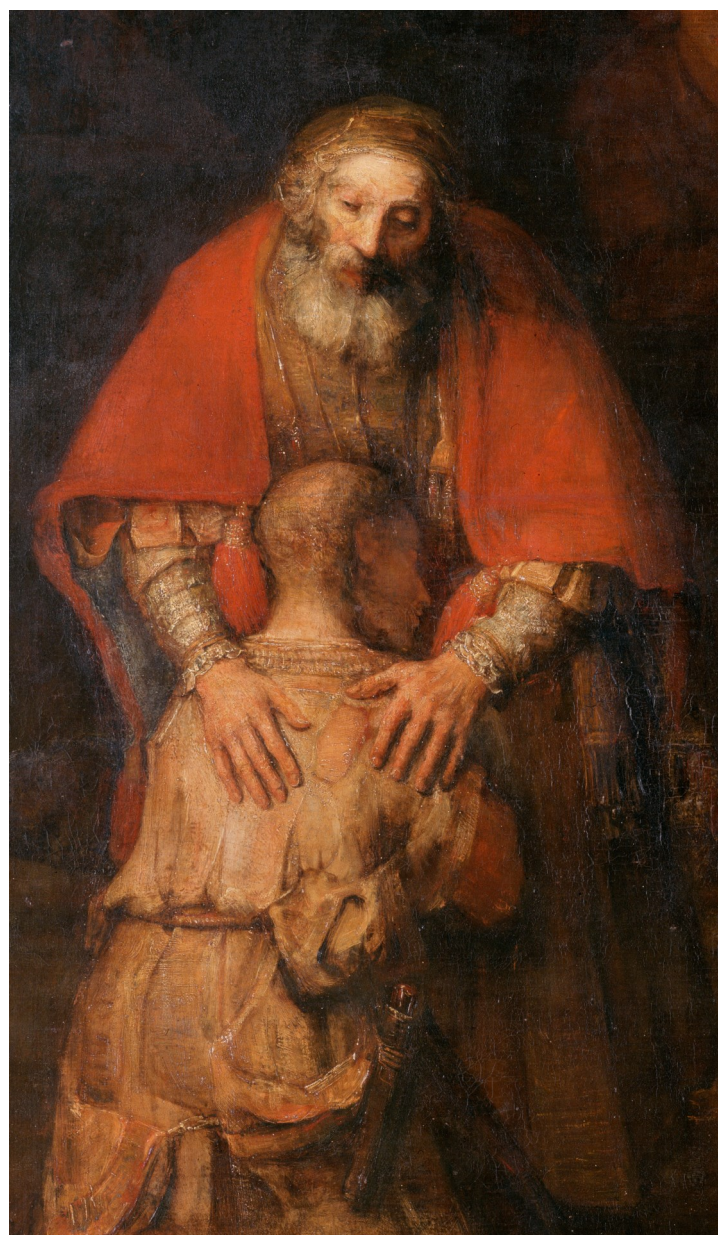
We are all debtors. All of us: to God who is so generous and to our brothers and sisters. Everyone knows that he/she is not the father or mother that he or she should be, the husband or wife, the brother or sister. We are all “in deficit” in life. And we need mercy. We know that we too have done wrong. There is always something lacking in the good that we should have done.

However, our very poverty becomes our strength to forgive! We are debtors and if, as we heard at the start, we shall be measured with the same measure with which we measure others (cf. Lk 6:38),

then it would be in our interest to widen our measure and to forgive debts; to forgive. All people should remember that they need to forgive, they stand in need of forgiveness and they need patience. This is the secret to mercy: by forgiving, one is forgiven.

God thus precedes us, and He forgives us first (cf. Rom 5:8). In receiving His forgiveness, we too are capable of forgiving. One's own misery and lack of justice, therefore, become opportunities to open oneself up to the Kingdom of Heaven, to a greater measure, the measure of God who is mercy.

Where does our mercy come from? Jesus told us: "Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful" (Lk 6:36). The more we welcome the Father's love, the more we can love (cf. CCC 2842). Mercy is not a dimension among others but rather the center of Christian life. There is no Christianity without mercy [Cf. Saint John Paul II, *Dives in Misericordia* (30 November 1980); *Misericordiae Vultus* (11 April 2015); *Misericordia et misera* (20 November 2016)].



If all our Christianity does not lead us to mercy, then we have taken the wrong path because mercy is the only true destination of all spiritual journeys. It is one of the most beautiful fruits of charity (cf. CCC 1829).

I remember that this theme was chosen for the first Angelus that I had to recite



as Pope: mercy. And this has remained very much impressed on me, as a message that I would always have to offer as Pope, a message for everyday: mercy. I remember that on that day I even had an attitude that was somewhat “brazen,” as if I were advertising a book about mercy that had just been published by Cardinal Kasper. And on that day, I felt very strongly that this is the message that I must offer as Bishop of Rome: mercy, mercy, please, forgiveness.

God’s mercy is our liberation and our happiness. We live from mercy and we cannot afford to be without mercy. It is the air that we breathe. We are too

poor to set any conditions. We need to forgive because we need to be forgiven. ⁽¹⁾

“Seeing and acting with mercy: that is holiness!”

(1) POPE FRANCIS: GENERAL AUDIENCE – Wednesday, March 18, 2020

Prayer

What a strange word, Lord, a word for dictionaries. It is hardly used except in this Beatitude, as if it were reserved for you, you alone. Mercy is Your name, it's true, but why not ours, on our level, and why not mine? We calculate, we judge, we condemn, we claim to always have the final word, we count offenses and prepare our revenge whereas You, Lord, You pardon, You trust, You do not know the quid pro quo of the earth, You stake everything on love and freedom. You who joyfully welcome the prodigal son, You who leave everything to seek out the lost sheep, You who care for the worker hired late in the afternoon, in a fantastic act of faith, hope and charity, God of tenderness and generosity, smiling and giving unconditionally, pass on to us the folly of your mercy.

(Gilbert Cesbron)

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