

Through Jesus, God's grace is with us until the end of time

The Year of Divine Mercy, the Sacrament of the Present Moment

**David
Torkington**



The Mass to inaugurate the Year of Divine Mercy had been prepared by the parishioners with the help of the curate and a group of the Sisters of Mercy. The readings, the psalms and the prayer had all been chosen to echo the overall theme of asking God to give his loving mercy to all those present and to the whole world that would be lost without it.

The visiting preacher came straight to the point. "Why waste your time praying for God's loving mercy?" he said. "Whether you pray for it or not, his loving mercy has been sent out, is being sent out, and will continue to be sent out whether you pray for it or not. Why not save your breath to cool your porridge, or rather save your breath to pray rather than that we will receive it!"

Many years ago I met a very holy Cistercian monk at Mbengwe in the Cameroon. He told me how one day after many years of spiritual darkness he became ill and was confined to bed

in the monastic infirmary. "Why, oh why has God abandoned me," he asked himself time and time again? Then, after begging God's mercy over and over again, he fell into what he could only describe to me as a weak but continuous ecstasy. "I was never totally taken out of myself," he explained, "but despite my illness and despite all that was going on around me I was totally absorbed in God whose presence filled me from within."

Then, on three distinct occasions just before he was given Communion, he heard these words, as clearly he said as you have been speaking to us in the church. The words were these: 'Only you have been keeping me out!'

In the Old Testament the word *hesed* is used to describe the Loving Kindness of God. It is translated by the Latin word *gratia* in the New Testament that gives birth to the English word 'grace'. Fortunately, nothing is lost in translation, in fact everything is gained. Now that thanks to Jesus, the Holy Spirit has been sent, and is continually being sent, his love is often referred to not as *hesed* but *gratia*, or grace. In short, it is the same love of God, but now thanks to the glorified Christ it is sent out with the power to forgive the sinfulness that would otherwise keep him out.

That's why all the sacraments give



Pope Francis prays during first vespers of Divine Mercy Sunday in St Peter's Basilica at the Vatican on 11th April, 2015.
Photo Cristian Gennari

'grace', his loving mercy that first forgives the sins that would otherwise prevent him making his home within us, as he promised at the Last Supper.

The Jesuit mystic Jean Pierre de Caussade (1675-1751) speaks of another sacrament through which God's loving mercy can reach us, if we only knew it. It is what he called "the sacrament of the present moment", because he insists every moment is the moment when God's loving mercy is being poured out through Jesus, who has promised to remain with us to the end of time. So, therefore, there is now no moment in time when, if we only turn to receive it, that God's grace cannot forgive us, to fill us with the love that our sinfulness has been keeping out.

A famous rabbi used to tell the story of a carpenter who dreamed of a magnificent treasure that had been set aside for him alone. Without hesitation he set out to spend the rest of his life searching for what would make his

dream come true. Tired and dejected he returned home at the end of his life empty handed. In his frustration he flung his tool bag down in front of his own fire place to see the floorboards split open. It was then that he saw the treasure that he had spent his whole life searching for, buried in front of his own hearth.

You do not need to go anywhere other than where you are to find the treasure that we all, deep down, desire more than anything else. It is not just any love, but the love from which all other love has its origin being made available here and now to everyone, who is prepared to give the daily space and time in which to learn how to receive it.

This work will not take you away from your husband, your wife or any of your family, it will help you to love them more deeply and more dearly than ever before.

Nor will it take you away from your work, it will enable you to work better

and treat your workmates better than you did before.

Jesus promised that he had come, "that you may have life and have it with ever greater abundance (Jn 10:10)." With this life suffusing your life with the life of God then all things will be possible to you that were quite impossible before.

If you give the daily time for the prayer that will enable you to do this, then I will give you the 'know-how' not from my experience, but from the experience of the great Christian saints and mystics from the beginning, beginning with Jesus himself.

This is how we can make this 'Year of Divine Mercy' a year that can change our lives permanently for the better.

David Torkington is the author of - 'Wisdom from the Western Isles', 'Wisdom from Franciscan Italy' and is just completing 'Wisdom from the Christian Mystics'. See more at www.davidtorkington.com

'We shall drive 500 miles, and we shall drive 500 more...' sing the team from the SVP

A dedicated team of SVP volunteer drivers helped keep a mum and her son together through dark times

When, back in 2012, a mother from Wallasey heard that her adult son had suffered a severe brain injury, she was devastated. Closure of public transport meant she couldn't travel from Wallasey to Liverpool where he was hospitalised. Visually impaired herself, Sally (not her real name), faced a Christmas apart from her son.

While she was still wondering what to do, help was not far away. Volunteer members from her local St Vincent de Paul Society (SVP) group at Holy Apostles and Martyrs Parish got together to co-ordinate lifts for Sally so she could visit her son in hospital for five days over Christmas.

But the struggle to keep the family together continued long after Christmas. In early January 2013, Sally's son suffered a massive seizure resulting in him falling into a deep coma for many months. During this time the SVP members continued to assist Sally by giving her lifts to and from the hospital. Doctors thought Sally's son would not survive another seizure or even a minor infection.

The situation looked bleak. But miraculously, Sally's son emerged from his coma and began to make slow

progress. In October 2014, he was ready to be moved to a specialist Rehabilitation Unit in Chester, over 20 miles away from Sally's home, even farther away than before.

However, as SVP member Sue Johnson recounts: "Sally was absolutely distraught about this move. For her it might as well as been the other end of the world."

After experimenting with train travel and realising that the journey was physically impossible for Sally, the local SVP members began to think creatively.

They considered whether it would be possible to have one set of drivers to take Sally down to the unit in Chester, and another set to collect her and bring her back home, doing this three times a week. Before long several Chester SVP groups had teamed up with SVP members in Wallasey to create a rota of drivers. Sue said: "Within no time at all, we had enough drivers, men and women, willing to do the 20 miles from and to Wallasey."

This creative thinking, coupled with dedication, meant that the SVP helped keep a little family together during an extremely tough time. Sue said: "Without us, Sally simply couldn't have gone to the Rehab Unit to see her son. We were her beacon of hope."

Happily, Sally's son has thrived in the unit and is making great progress in his recovery.

Shrewsbury SVP Central Council President Dominic Ion says: "The SVP is made up of ordinary people who with the Holy Spirit's help are capable of extraordinary things.



"The support that SVP members in Wirral and Chester have given to Sally and her son is a living example of this."

The regular contact between mother and son has no doubt contributed greatly to the ongoing recovery that he continues to make.

Such contact would not have been possible without the assistance Sally received from the SVP.

To find out more about joining or donating to the SVP, visit www.svp.org.uk or telephone SVP national office on 0207 703 3030.

Above, some of the dedicated team of volunteer driver with a 'thank you' cake from grateful mum Sally. Without the work of the team, Sally would have been kept apart from her son at a difficult time for the pair of them