

CHAPTER FIVE

“Blessed Are The Merciful For They Shall Obtain Mercy”

Mercy Is One Of God's Qualities:

Mercy is one of God's qualities and the merciful one bears a His likeness.

It was said about God *"The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in mercy. He will not always strive with us, nor will He keep His anger forever. He has not dealt with us according to our sins. Nor punished us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy towards those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us."* (Ps 103:8-12).

God's wonderful mercy was manifested strongly and clearly on the cross.

There He took the sins of all human beings upon His shoulders and forgave them. He is the merciful, good God, who does not take any pleasure in the death of the wicked. Rather, he is pleased when they turn from their ways and live (Ezek 18:23).

98He is the God who pronounced the judgement of destruction on the Ninevites, and when they repented and turned from their evil ways He had compassion on them and did not bring upon them the destruction He had threatened (John 3:10).

It is God who sometimes threatens, then becomes overcome by His compassion.

In His mercy, God received the repentant people without insulting them.

In Chapter 15 of the Gospel of Saint Luke the Evangelist, He presented three stories about His acceptance of the repentant, the lost and the straying: The lost sheep, the lost son and the lost coin.

He mentioned how God searched for them and how He rejoiced at their return without rebuking anyone.

The Lord received Simon Peter in the same way after the resurrection. He did not hurt his feelings or mention how Peter had denied Him by saying *"I don't know the man."*, but restored him to his apostolic rank and said to him *"Feed My lambs,. take care of My sheep."* (John 21).

In His mercy, the Lord had compassion on the scattered people.

About this, the Holy Bible says *"But when he saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd."* (Matt 9.36).

99

In the midnight absolution found in the Agpeya (prayers of the canonical hours), we pray for the sake of such people saying *"O' God, remember the helpless, the bedridden and those who are not remembered by anyone."*

God is merciful. He helps those who are helpless.

In our prayers we say *"O' God, helper of the helpless, hope of the hopeless, consolation of the poor in spirit and harbour to those who struggle in the tempest."*

Is there any other mercy we can ascribe to God? The person who takes care of such miserable people follows the example of the Lord.

Because the Lord is merciful, He made mercy superior to adoration. He said: *"For I desire mercy, and not sacrifice."* (Hos 6:6).

In every place and at all times, people knew that God was merciful.

When Nathan the prophet laid three options before David for him to choose from, David said: *"Let us fall in the hands of the Lord, for His mercies are great, but do not let me fall into the hands of men."* (2 Sam 24:14).

How strange this is!?! If we are in the hands of the all Holy, the perfect in His Holiness, in His Goodness and in His Righteousness, He will protect us and will not deal with us

100

according to our sins but will respond to us when we say *"According to Your mercy and not to our sins."*

But if we fall into the hands of man, he will not sympathise with us, and although he resembles us in our sins and weaknesses, he would insult us at every turn.

The Importance Of Mercy:

Because mercy is so important, God made it a measure for condemnation in the final judgment.

On the last day, God will say to those on His left "*Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels*" (Matt 25:41).

Why did He give this sentence? He says immediately after this "*For I was hungry and you gave Me no food, I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.*"

Then, he explains the reason saying "*Whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for Me.*" (Matt 25:42-45).

Therefore, those people perished because they did not show mercy to the needy.

This means that although you have your prayers, contemplations and hymns, if you are not merciful, you will find

101

no mercy on the Last Day when you stand before God who will say "*I desire mercy, not sacrifice.*" (Matt 9:13).

This is why the church teaches us to say in the third service of the midnight prayer:

"In the final judgment, there will be no mercy to those who were not merciful " But, "blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." (Matt 5:7).

The Lord uses this measure when He deals with people, whether mercy with respect to worldly material matters such as hunger, thirst and illness, or with dealings, or spiritual affairs.

In all cases He gave a final decision saying "*With the same measure you use, it will be measured to you and to you who hear, more will be given.*" (Mark 4:24).

If you deal mercifully with people, God will do the same with you. But if you deal with others cruelly, you will not deserve mercy. Our Lord says "*For with what judgement you judge , you will be judged.*" (Matt 7:2).

This is why the Lord advises us saying "*Therefore whatever you want men to do to you , do also to them.*" (Matt 7:12). If you wish to be treated mercifully, treat others mercifully.

He who is merciful shows the Lord to others and mercy goes before him.

102

This is why the Holy Bible says "*Blessed is he who considers the poor; the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble*" (Ps 41:1).

On the other hand He says "*Whoever shuts his ears to the cry of the poor, will also cry himself and not be heard.*" (Prov 21:13).

Your mercy on others precedes you and intercedes for you before God.

If you show mercy to others, God will be merciful towards you. But if you are harsh and fierce, do not protest if you receive the same treatment. As for forgiveness, the Lord said, "*Condemn not and you shall not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven*" (Luke 6:37).

In the same verse He also said "*Do not judge, and you will not be judged.*"

Then He said "*Give and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be put into your bosom. For with the measure that you use, it will be measured back to you*" (Luke 6:38).

Concerning forgiveness, the Lord also said "*For if you forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, your Father will not forgive your trespasses.*" (Matt 6:14,15).

He who does not forgive keeps forgiveness away from himself.

103

Even if he was forgiven in the past, it will be taken away from him.

On this subject, the Lord taught us the parable of the debtor (Matt 18:23-35).

To sum up the parable, there was a servant who owed his master ten thousand talents. His master took pity on him and cancelled the debt.

When the servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He had no compassion on him, and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt.

When the master found out what had happened, he called the servant in and said, "*You wicked servant, "I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?"*"

In anger, his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he could pay back all he owed.

The Lord concluded saying: "*So My heavenly Father also will do to you. If each of you, from his heart does not forgive his brother his trespasses.*" (Matt 18:35).

104

The Grandeur Of Mercy And Its Signs:

Because of mercy, the Lord preferred the Samaritan, a foreigner, to both the priest and the Levite: Perhaps the priest would excuse himself, saying that he had incense to raise or a sacrifice to offer and had no time to take care of the traveller whom the robbers had wounded and left half dead!

Perhaps the Levite would apologise, saying that he was serving in the house of God.

Neither of their apologies not accepted, because God desires mercy not sacrifice (Matt 12:7).

But the Lord praised the good Samaritan because "*And when he saw him, he had compassion on him; and went to him and bandaged his wounds... and took care of him.*" (Luke 10:33- 34).

He considered him to be the only one worthy of the title of "neighbour" because he showed mercy.

Mercy is connected with people's condemnation of each other.

There are people who judge others harshly and cruelly. This does not show mercy and may perhaps turn into a case of oppression.

Such judgment of others may include insults and biting remarks without any consideration for the circumstances of others.

105

It strictly concentrates on faults. For example, Job's friends reproached him without mercy till he said to them "*How long will you torment my soul and break me in pieces with words? These ten times you have reproached me.*" (Job 19:1,2). "*I also could speak as you, if you were in my place.*" (Job 16:4). "*Have pity on me, my friends, have pity, for the hand of God has struck me.*" (Job 19:21).

The merciful person forgives and excuses others. He does not treat them with severity.

Instead of being hard in his reproach, he tries to find an excuse for them. Jesus Christ's behaviour was the same. When His disciples slept during the most critical time and could not stay awake for even an hour, He forgave them and said "*The spirit indeed is willing, but the body is weak.*" (Matt 26:41).

When He was on the cross, with all empathy, He made a plea for those who crucified Him saying, "*Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do.*" (Luke 23:34).

During the prayer for the departed, the church makes a plea on their behalf, saying "As they lived in this world in flesh "

And also says "*Because, there is no one who is free from sin, even if he spends only one day on earth.*"

Saint Paul the apostle asked for mercy for the sake of his brothers who did not stand by him when he was arrested. He said "*At my first defence, no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them.*" (2 Tim 4:16).

For these reasons, people love the father confessor who is characterised by mercy.

They love the good hearted confession father who considers view the psychological state of the person who comes to him shyly and apprehensively. He does not rebuke him severely, nor despise his failure. He does not shrink from what he hears him say, nor does he deal with him in a destructive manner, But rather he shows compassion, however great his fall may be. He prays for him and asks God to give him power, repentance and forgiveness, because he is a compassionate father who knows the weakness of human nature and the strength of the devil who fights it...

Saint Moses the Black was treated with the same kindness when he repented.

God prepared a very tolerant confession father, St. Isotheres the priest, for him; this man was compassionate towards sinners. This saint embraced him easily from the beginning and led him peacefully until he became a saint.

One night, Moses the Black came to the saint ten times and the saint did not get worried. He advised him to stay in his cell, but Moses answered that he was not able to because the war was very severe upon him. However, through the patience of his spiritual father, the war was taken away from him and Moses grew in spirit.

A merciful heart has compassion upon sinners, no matter how great their fall may be.

107

He puts before his eyes the words of St. Paul the Apostle, "*Remember the prisoners as if chained with them, and those who are mistreated, since you yourselves are in the body also*" (Heb 13:3).

In his mercy, the Lord Jesus Christ had compassion upon the woman who was caught in the very act of adultery. He saved her from those who wanted to stone her and said, "*Neither do I condemn you, go and sin no more*" (John 8:11). He also defended another sinful woman who washed His feet with her tears in the house of Simon the Pharisee (Luke 7:44).

A merciful heart also is not spiteful. It does not repay evil for evil, but follows the Lord's commandment "*do good to those who hate you*" (Matt 5:44). If people hate you...do not be like them.. If they treat you harshly, do not do the same. Cruelty and vengeance do not agree with mercy.

Cruelty: Cruelty goes against mercy and is of two kinds:

Cruelty towards people, and cruelty towards God.

Cruelty towards people is well known. It means treating them violently or harshly, or tormenting them, showing disregard for them, and the like, while cruelty towards God is rejecting Him and refusing to respond to His voice within a person. An example of this is Jerusalem, who rejected the many prophets sent to it by God, and even stoned and killed some of them... It

108

did not listen to God's voice on their tongues... So the divine inspiration says, "*If you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts*" (Heb 3:7).

Perhaps Pharaoh had both kinds of cruelty: He treated the people harshly, and when they begged him to decrease the burden, he imposed more tasks on them. He ordered the taskmasters not to give them straw to make bricks and to let them collect it themselves and make the same quota as before... When the people complained, he said, "*You are idle!*" (Ex 5:6-17).

Pharaoh was also hard-hearted, as he did not respond to God's voice despite the wonders performed before him by Moses and despite the ten plagues...

The Spirit of God cannot dwell in the heart of a cruel person.

He cannot dwell in an obstinate, spiteful or merciless heart as the Holy Bible says, "*The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace and gentleness*" (Gal 5:22). Violence contradicts all these things.

This is why the Spirit of God cannot find a place to rest in a hard, cruel, violent heart.

St. Stephen rebuked the Jews for the cruelty of their hearts. He said to them, "*You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears. You always resist the Holy Spirit as your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers.*" (Acts 7:51-52).

109

After death, hard-hearted people are tormented by images of their cruel deeds.

All the deeds through which they tormented others follow them, appear before them and cause them trouble. They cannot escape them. They remind them of their merciless hearts...

The image of Abel being murdered by his brother undoubtedly followed and troubled Cain not only in heaven but on earth also... For God said to him, "*The voice of your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground*" (Gen 4:10).

To Whom Will God Show Mercy?

We said that mercy is one of the qualities of God. Who, then, will be worthy of His mercy?

1. God shows mercy to those who ask for it with all their hearts.

This is why, we daily and continually ask God to have mercy on us.

In the introductory prayer of each hour, we recite psalm 51 which begins with the phrase "Have mercy on me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness." and we conclude every hour with the prayer "Have mercy upon us O' God, have mercy upon us." When we enter the church and bow down towards the holy temple, we say "But as for me, I will

110

come into Your house in the multitude of Your mercy, in fear of You I will worship towards Your holy temple" (Ps 5:7).

During the raising of incense in the evening and the morning, the priest recites the hymn

"Ephnouti Nai Nan" which means "O' God, have mercy on us."

He begins each hourly prayer with the phrase "Ep-shoi-d nai nan" which means: "O' God, have mercy on us."

These prayers might have been quoted from the prayer of the tax-collector who said "*God be merciful to me, a sinner.*" (Luke 18:13).

During each prayer we say "Kyrieleison" forty one times which means "O' God, have mercy on us." Does each person who asks for mercy get it according to the promise of God "*Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find*" (Matt 7:7)? Or is this conditional? Yes, it is:

2. God has mercy on those who show mercy to others.

This is why He said "*Blessed are the merciful for shall obtain mercy.*" (Matt 5:7).

So we say in the midnight prayer "He who is not merciful will receive no mercy on the Last Day."

The cruel people who have no mercy on others are unworthy of God's mercy. They may remember their lack of kindness when they are in need of mercy and are unable to find it.

111

When Joseph's brothers experienced hardship in Egypt, they said to one another "Surely we are being punished because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen; that's why this distress has come upon us." *But Reuben answered "Did I not speak to you saying 'Do not sin against the boy?' and you wouldn't listen? Therefore behold, this blood is now required of us."* (Gen 42:21-22).

And when the charge was trumped up against them, and Joseph's cup was found in Benjamin's sack, Judah threw himself to the ground before Joseph and said to him "*How shall we clear*

ourselves? God has found out the iniquity of your servants." (Gen 44:16).

3. To the contrary of that: God will show mercy to the oppressed, even if they do not ask Him to do so.

The mere iniquity under which they live shouts to God, asking for His justice.

This is why the Lord said, *"I have surely seen the oppression of My people ... I have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows. So, I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians."* (Ex 3:7,8).

He also said in the psalm; *"For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, Now I will arise. I will set him in the safety for which he yearns."* (Psalm 11).

112

Divine Inspiration also says *"Who executes justice for the oppressed. The Lord gives freedom to the prisoners. The Lord opens the eyes of the blind. The Lord raises those who are bowed down. The Lord watches over the strangers. He relieves the fatherless and the widow"* (Psalm 145).

The Lord reclaims the rights of the oppressed from their oppressors.

When **Saint Macarius the Great** was a youth, it happened that a girl conceived through having committed adultery. After the secret had been revealed, the adulterer suggested that she accuse Macarius, who lived in seclusion (before he went to Eskete). So people came to him, insulted him severely and charged him with the expenses of both the girl and her illegitimate child after the birth.

Then, the Lord interfered. It was a difficult delivery. As the pains were unbearable, the girl could not find any way to save herself except to confess that she had wrongly accused that righteous man.

Naboth the Jezreelite was greatly oppressed by Ahab and Jezebel.

God avenged Naboth's blood. He said to Ahab through Elijah ". This is why the Lord said, *"In the place where dogs licked up the blood of Naboth, dogs shall lick up your blood!"* (1 Kin. 21:19).

The Lord showed mercy upon Mordecai also; He took revenge on Haman who had treated Mordecai unjustly.

113

Haman had planned a conspiracy against Mordecai. He made a gallows fifty cubits high on which to hang him.

Meanwhile, the Lord interfered and spoke to the heart of king Xerxes and revealed to him Mordecai's past glorious deeds, and the evil ones of Haman. Then the king said to his attendants *"Hang Haman on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai"* (Est 7:9-10).

The Lord also showed mercy to Moses and his people and saved them from Pharaoh's cruelty.

Therefore, Moses and his people were rescued from Pharaoh's slavery when the Lord swept his chariots and horsemen into the Red Sea.

The Lord supported Moses against Aaron and Miriam when they spoke against him.

The Lord defended Moses and made him a man of authority before them, He rebuked them and struck Miriam with leprosy and did not forgive her in spite of Moses' advocacy for her. So Miriam was confined outside the camp for seven days (Num 12:9-15).

On the other hand, God did not support Moses when he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. (Ex 2:14).

There are many other examples which show how the Lord stands against oppressors.

114

The Lord supported young David against king Saul when this king treated him unjustly and wished to kill him. Saul's end came and the Spirit of the Lord departed from him (1 Sam 16:14).

At last David conquered but when he wanted to deal harshly with Nabal, God sent Abigail to rebuke him (1 Samuel 25).

The Lord was also against Cain when he killed his brother Abel. God punished him and he became a fugitive and vagabond on earth (Genesis 4).

The Lord shows his mercy to all people, but He does not have compassion upon the oppressors because the measure they use will be measured to them (Matt 7:2).

Perhaps the punishment they receive is powerful enough to turn them from the cruelty in their hearts and from treating others unjustly. But if they resist, they would become an example to others. For this reason, be oppressed throughout your life and not an oppressor; be crucified and not a crucifier.

4. God shows mercy to the weak, the banished, the rejected and the crushed.

The Lord supported the broken hearted tax-collector who went home justified before God.

Contrary to this was the proud Pharisee who convicted others. (Luke 18:14).

The Lord supported Zacchaeus, who climbed a sycamore - fig tree to see him, paying no attention to those who considered him a sinner. (Luke 19:6,7).

115

The Lord showed mercy to the sinful despised woman who was caught in the very act of adultery and rebuked those hard hearted people who wished to stone her saying "*He who is without sin, among you, let him throw a stone at her first.*" (John 8: 7).

5. God shows mercy to the person who has no one to treat him with compassion.

He did so with the invalid of Bethesda who had been sick for thirty eight years and had no one to help him into the pool. (John 5:7).

This is why, when we pray, we say that the Lord is the helper of the helpless, and the hope of the hopeless. So the Lord showed mercy upon Lot when the people of Sodom moved forward to break down the door of his house. (Gen 19).

Our merciful God moves gradually according to our capacity. He will not let us be tempted beyond what we can bear. But when we are tempted, he will also provide a way out. (1 Cor 10:13). He gives us milk, not solid food if we are not yet ready for it. (1 Cor. 3:2).

He commands us compassionately "*If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.*" (Rom. 12:18).

I wish we could learn mercy from the Lord and become merciful.