



**IN HIS FIRST ANGELUS** address in 2013, Pope Francis spoke of mercy in light of that day's gospel. It was the story of the woman caught in adultery, who everyone was eager to condemn.

"Jesus' attitude is striking," the Holy Father observed. "We do not hear words of scorn, we do not hear words of condemnation, but only words of love, of mercy, which are an invitation to conversion." He emphasizes Jesus' declaration: "Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again."

"Ah! Brothers and Sisters," said Pope Francis, "God's face is the face of a merciful father who is always patient. Have you thought about God's patience, the patience he has with each one of us? That is his mercy. He always has patience, patience with us, he understands us, he waits for us, he does not tire of forgiving us if we are able to return to him with a contrite heart.

Those words of love, of mercy, of invitation, that remarkable divine patience is an important context in which to consider a later papal reflection on the gospel Beatitude of mercy.

"There is a peculiar aspect to this beatitude, Pope Francis said. "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.' It is always the same reciprocity. And the Letter of James states that 'mercy triumphs over judgment.'

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

"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 overturn the 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 bride or groom, 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. ...

"Each person should remember that they need to forgive, they are in need of forgiveness and they need patience. This is the secret to mercy: by forgiving one is forgiven. Thus God precedes us and he forgives us first. 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."