



# 'Light for the Path' a Resource for Families in the Year of Mercy

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## Session Four: 'Who is my neighbour?' – the action of Mercy

*In Sacred Scripture, mercy is a key word that indicates God's action towards us. He does not limit himself merely to affirming his love, but makes it visible and tangible. Love, after all, can never be just something we only think about. By its nature, it is something concrete, real – in our intentions, attitudes, and behaviour in everyday life. The mercy of God is his loving concern for each one of us. He feels responsible; that is, he desires our wellbeing and he wants to see us happy, full of joy, and peaceful. This is the path which the merciful love of Christians must also travel. As the Father loves, so do his children. Just as he is merciful, so we are called to be merciful to each other. (Adapted from Pope Francis, MV 9)*

### Step One: We Gather in a Welcoming Space

Decide on the best time, before or after school, evening or weekend.

Welcome everyone. It's good to be here! How has life been recently? Are you ready to get 'inside' a parable?

### Background

The story of the Good Samaritan only appears in the Gospel of St Luke. Through this parable, Jesus teaches again the priority of love: Love of God, and love of neighbour. The proof of love of neighbour is shown in 'eleos' (Greek for 'mercy') and in this story it is used in the sense of 'helping those in need'. 'Eleos' is an attitude of mind or a 'lens' through which we are asked to see and respond to the world around us. As the 'trademark' of the law of justice with mercy, it is not to be neglected. It serves as a good examination of conscience!

## Step Two: We Look At Our Experience

We begin this session thinking about our lives, and what might be our own experience of either feeling attacked, robbed and left physically, spiritually or emotionally drained ourselves, or perhaps, how we have been a 'good neighbour' for members of our families or the wider community, or for complete strangers in times of acute suffering or need.

- What do you think helps you to respond to someone in need? Why bother?
- What can get in the way of you responding to someone in need?
- When have you been in great need and experienced help? Who helped you and how? When have you been the one to respond to someone's great need?

## In our Catholic Tradition

The Church teaches that Jesus Christ comes to us in many ways, since all of creation is 'sacramental' or showing us God. One of the ways Jesus comes in is our neighbours – that is, in our families and in every person we meet. How we treat each person is how we treat Jesus himself! And this is not just about 'praying' or being super spiritual, but by paying attention to the needs of the people who come across our path. The parent who spends time looking after a stressed friend's child alongside their own, or the plumber who fixes the neighbour's blocked drain free of charge, are both meeting Christ and being Christ. St Teresa of Avila (1515-1582) wrote this prayer: **"Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, nor feet on earth, but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks with compassion on this world."**

In his Address in St Peter's Square, 3 October 2015, on the eve of the Synod on the Family, **Pope Francis said**, '...we do not grow in the love of God by avoiding the entanglement of human relations. For in loving others, we learn to love God; in stooping down to help our neighbour, we are lifted up to God. Through closeness and solidarity with the poor and abandoned, (we) come to understand that it is they who evangelise us, they who help us grow in humanity.'

## Step Three: We listen – the Word of God (see pictures on back page)

At this step you might like to use the '*lectio divina*' guide in this resource. Invite someone to read the Gospel passage slowly, pausing after each verse or couple of verses. Ask everyone to listen and see what catches their attention. Either use a bible, marking the pages in advance (Gospel of Luke, 10:25-37) or read from the text boxes below.

### Gospel of Luke, Chapter 10, verses 25-37

A teacher of the law stood up. He was trying to test Jesus. He said, 'Teacher, what must I do to get life for ever?' Jesus said to him, 'What is written in the law? What do you read there? You already know!' The man answered, 'That's true, I do know. It is to love the Lord your God. To love him with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind'. Also, 'You must love your neighbour as you love yourself.' Jesus said to him, 'Your answer is right. Do this and you will have life forever.' But the man wanted to show that the way he was living was right. So he said to Jesus, 'And who is my neighbour?' To answer this question, Jesus said, 'A man was going down the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. Some robbers attacked him. They tore off his clothes and beat him and took everything he had. Then they left him lying there, almost dead.'

It happened that a Jewish priest was going down that road. When the priest saw the man who had been hurt and left lying there half-dead, he walked by on the other side of the road, and went on his way. Next, a Levite came there. He went over and looked at the man who had been hurt, robbed and left lying there half dead, and he walked by on the other side of the road. Then a person who did not come from Jerusalem, a visitor from a country called Samaria, came travelling down the road. (The Jews did not like the Samaritans and the Samaritans did not like the Jews). When this stranger, the Samaritan, came to where the hurt man was lying, half dead, he saw the man and felt very sorry for him. The Samaritan went to him and put medicine on his wounds (in those days, oil and wine was used) and he bandaged them. He then put the hurt man on his own donkey and took him to an inn. At the inn, the Samaritan took care of him that night. The next day, the Samaritan brought out two silver coins, and gave them to the innkeeper. The Samaritan said, 'Take care of this man. If you spend more money on him, I will pay it back to you when I come again.' Then Jesus said, 'Which one of these three men do you think was a neighbour to the man who was attacked by robbers?' The teacher of the law answered 'The one who helped him'. Jesus said to him, 'Then go and do the same thing he did'.

*Scripture quoted from International Children's Bible, New Century Version (Anglicised Edition) copyright 1991 by Authentic Media. Used by permission. (This version was translated solely for children from the original Hebrew and Greek texts).*

## Step Four: We Respond

- What caught your attention in this story? How might you respond to the question of the lawyer at the start: What must I do to gain eternal life? What do you think God expects of us in our families?
- Who would you like to be in this story? Why? Who would you not like to be?
- What might it be like to be the one hurt by the bandits, and left lying at the side of the road, half dead? From this position of the robbed and beaten-up person, how do you see the story now?
- What about being either of the ones who 'passed by on the other side'?
- I wonder, what does the story tell us about what is expected of us as family people or 'Church family' people?
  - **Did you know:** In biblical times, Levites were men from the tribe of Levi, who helped the Jewish priests with their work in the Temple. The Samaritans were people from Samaria. They were part Jewish, but were not accepted as true Jews. Jews and Samaritans despised each other. (In fact the teacher of the law even found it difficult to say the word 'Samaritan' when asked by Jesus which of the three had been a good neighbour). In those times, oil and wine were used as medicine to clean wounds. A denarius was a Roman coin, and one coin was average pay for a day's work.

## Step Five: We Mix it Together

Jesus says to the lawyer: 'Go and do the same yourself': actively show your love by being compassionate and merciful. St John of the Cross, friend of St Teresa of Avila (who wrote the prayer we looked at earlier), said 'At the evening of life, we shall be judged on our love' (*Dichos 64*)

- When have we had a similar experience to a character in the story? What happened? What does it feel like to be in pain, and be ignored? Or to be an 'outsider' and try to offer help?
- I wonder what gets in the way of noticing and responding to the needs of people in our families, or amongst our neighbours or strangers?
- What would it be like if the person finding the injured/hurt person was a child?

We are invited

- **At home:** Think about who has helped us through difficult times. How do we support one another in the family in difficult times? Share ideas together, adults and children, on how we might be more aware and actively show we care about other people who are in painful or difficult situations.

## Step Six: What Might We Do Differently Or New This Week?

- Perhaps, in your family, or amongst your friends or neighbours, there is someone in particular in need or hurting. What could you do about it this week/month?
- How might we get to know one another better in our parish and wider community? Are there some small steps that you and your family could join in with, or initiate yourselves?

## Step Seven: We Pray

**Leader:** Let's sit quietly for a moment, and remember the story of the Good Samaritan, and all we have shared together. (*Pause for thinking back*). As we think about these things, we pray:

*Thank you for being with us as we gather here in your name Lord Jesus. Through our time together, you have deepened our awareness of how to follow you, being your hands and feet, your eyes, your heart and voice. May our families and homes be places where anyone can come and experience through us God's love and mercy for them. We make this prayer, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen*

**God of Surprises!** Here is another place where the word 'mercy' appears in the prayers of the Mass.

After the 'Our Father' the Priest continues:

'Deliver us, Lord, we pray, from every evil, graciously grant peace in our days, that, **by the help of your mercy**, we may be always free from sin and safe from all distress, as we await the blessed hope and the coming of our Saviour, Jesus Christ'.



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Here are two pictures of the 'Good Samaritan'. Which one do you like and why? What might it be like to be in this picture? Where would you be? Which character do you identify with, whether visible in the picture, or not? Imagine yourself in the story. What is your experience? What about the other characters, visible, or not, how do they respond to you?

- I wonder what it's actually like to be the one lying at the side of the road, beaten up and robbed, in need of help? Who are the 'bandits' or 'robbers'?
- I wonder what it's like to be the one who comes along and passes by? Why would you pass by?
- I wonder what it's like to be the one who stops and helps?

When someone is in need and is either ignored, or helped, what changes in the heart of (1) the one who is helped? (2) the Priest? (3) the Levite? (4) the 'good neighbour' who helps? (5) You? How might you see the world a bit differently?

How can we be more aware, and be actively supportive of others, in our families, and in the parish and wider community?