



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

Session Six: 'When did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?' (Mt 25:37) - the Kingdom of Mercy

*'The Jubilee year will close with the liturgical Solemnity of Christ the King on 20th November 2016. On that day ... we shall be filled, above all, with a sense of gratitude and thanksgiving to the Most Holy Trinity for having granted us an extraordinary time of grace. We will entrust the life of the Church, all humanity, and the entire cosmos to the Lordship of Christ, asking him to pour out his mercy upon us like the morning dew, so that everyone may work together to build a brighter future ... steeped in mercy, so that we can go out to every man and woman, bringing the goodness and tenderness of God! May the balm of mercy reach everyone, both believers and those far away, as **a sign that the Kingdom of God is already present in our midst!**'*

From the Pope's document on the Year of Mercy, MV 5

- You might like to read slowly through the above extract of Pope Francis' document on mercy. What catches your attention? Do you hear anything 'new' to you?

Step One: We Gather in a Welcoming Space

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

Welcome everyone. It's good to be here! How has life been recently?

Background

The Gospel of St. Matthew is the gospel of the 'Kingdom of God' – through Jesus, God is present, from the beginning as 'Emmanuel' meaning 'God-with-us' to the end, the Risen Jesus, promising to be with us always. This promise of Christ present with us continues to be made real in families and communities down the ages to our own days, guiding our lives,

accompanying us in joys and sorrows, gracing us with the ability to love and reconcile, and to make decisions. In Matthew's gospel, Jesus is already seen as 'kingly', and his 'kingdom' of love and mercy, justice and peace, is already growing, teaching and encouraging us to live a life turned out towards others, with the common good at heart. This is the way we bring the kingdom 'on earth as it is in heaven' as we pray in the Our Father. 'Good works' are beautiful like 'wedding garments' (Mt 22:11) and a source of energy, like the 'oil' in an old-fashioned lamp - the fuel that keeps it shining out, giving light. At the end of our earthly lives, we will hear from Jesus that when we did any good work for another person, we did it for Jesus himself. (Mt 25:45)

Pope Francis asks us to open our hearts to those living on the edges in uncertain and painful situations, those without a voice because their cries are drowned out by indifference – to busy or hard-hearted to notice, or if we do, we don't know how to respond. 'May we reach out to them and support them so they can feel the warmth of our presence, our friendship, and our fraternity! May their cry become our own'... (MV 15)

Step Two: We Look At Our Experience

Let's stop and think about our lives, and what might be our own experience of living the ways of the Kingdom of God.

- What would you say are the signs of love and mercy active in your family?
- What are the 'painful' situations that you have faced, or are facing?
- How do you 'bind up broken hearts' in your family situations?
- How do your family and other families together support one another?
- What about in the parish – how do you support one another?
- What about people who feel on the edge – in our families? In our parishes?

In our Catholic Tradition

In his preaching and action Jesus shows us the way to be. We are called to wake up, rediscover, reflect and then ACT on what the Church has come to call 'the corporal and spiritual works of mercy': to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, heal the sick, visit the imprisoned, bury the dead, counsel the doubtful, teach and overcome ignorance, caution people on the wrong track, comfort anyone in distress of any kind, forgive those who offend, reject anger and violence and be patient with anyone who speaks or acts against us, and pray for people living and dead. In each of these 'little ones', Pope Francis says, Christ himself is present. .. 'As we prepare to leave this life, we will be judged on the basis of love' (St John of the Cross, quoted in MV15)

In Pope Francis' response to the Synods, 'The Joy of Love' on Love in the Family, he says

'Led by the Spirit, the family circle is not only open to life by generating it within itself, but also by going out and spreading life by caring for others and seeking their happiness. ... When a family is welcoming and reaches out to others, especially the poor and the neglected, it is 'a symbol, witness and participant in the Church's motherhood'

(FC #49) See Pope Francis, The Joy of Love, #324.

Step Three: We listen – the Word of God (see picture on final 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 Matthew 25:34-40) or read from the text box below.

Gospel of Matthew, Chapter 25:34-46 *Jesus is teaching about his kingdom, and at the end of time, Jesus, the King, will sit on his great throne and all the people of the world will be gathered before him. He will separate them into two groups – like a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. The sheep or 'good people' will stand on his right, and the goats or 'bad people' on his left.*

Then the King will say to the good people on his right, 'Come. My Father has given you his blessing. Come and receive the kingdom God has prepared for you since the world was made. I was hungry and you gave me food. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was alone and away from home, and you invited me into your house. I was without clothes and you gave me something to wear. I was sick and you cared for me. I was in prison and you visited me.

Then the good people will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and give you food? When did we see you thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you alone and away from home and invite you into our house? When did we see you without clothes and give you something to wear? When did we see you sick or in prison and care for you? Then the King will answer, 'I tell you the truth. Anything you did for any of my people here, you also did for me.' Then the King will say to those on his left, 'Go away from me. God has said that you will be punished... I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink. I was alone and away from home and you did not invite me into your house. I was without clothes, and you gave me nothing to wear. I was sick and in prison and you did not care for me.' Then those people will answer,... 'Lord when did we see these things and not help you?' Then the King will answer, 'I tell you the truth. Anything you refused to do for any of my people here, you refused to do for me'. 'These people will go off to be punished forever. But the good people will go to live for ever.'

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?
- Who would you like to be in this story? Why?
- Who would you *not* like to be? Why?

Step Five: We Mix it Together

Most of the time, we are unconsciously getting on with the business of feeding and clothing and caring for family members. However, sometimes in our families it's possible to be so caught up in our routines and the demands of life, and our own selfishness too, that we can fail to notice the pain that is going on, and the silent cries for help, from our children, our parents, our siblings and wider. And then, there are there are the challenging, uncertain and painful situations in the world around us. Do we notice? What can we do?

- What's it like to be wounded and in pain, and no-one notices?
- Who is in pain of any kind in your family? And amongst your friends?
- What particular 'work of mercy' is crying out for attention and action?
- What about more widely – what situations have touched your conscience? What 'wounds' or suffering do you think you may have been indifferent to?

We are invited

- **At home:** Consider all the different members of the family, immediate and wider, and who needs your love and care at the moment. What about people 'on the edge' of family or community life, for any number of reasons? What stays with you from the conversation? What needs to change? Can we say sorry to those we have hurt or when we have failed to notice their pain?

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

- I wonder what you/your family could do to reach out and offer 'the warmth of our presence, our friendship' as Pope Francis says? At home, in the family? In the community? More widely?

- How can the cries of people in painful situations become our own? Who needs to be acknowledged? Who needs our voice to speak up for them, a word of consolation, or our kindness to welcome and accept them?
- What specific 'mission' of mercy can we participate in or develop from scratch in our family or parish or community?

Step Seven: We Pray

Leader: Let's sit quietly for a moment, thinking about all we have shared, and remembering the story of the end of time, asking ourselves 'When did we see you Lord?' and listening to his reply. Can we recognise His presence in everyone we meet, and know that whatever we do to love and care for others, we do for Christ? Jesus is with us always, giving us the strength and power we need to be compassionate and merciful, in our families, amongst friends and strangers, pouring out the boundless love and mercy of our Heavenly Father. *(Pause for thinking back)*. As we think about these things, we pray:

You are with us as we gather here in your name Lord Jesus. Through our time together, you have deepened our awareness of how to live out in our daily lives the mercy which the Father constantly extends to everyone. Surprise us Lord, as we open our hearts to the love and mercy you share with us. May it be like a spring of water welling up in us – a spring that will never run dry, no matter how many people draw from it. May we never grow tired of being merciful. May we be patient in offering compassion and comfort. We make this prayer, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Adapted from MV25)

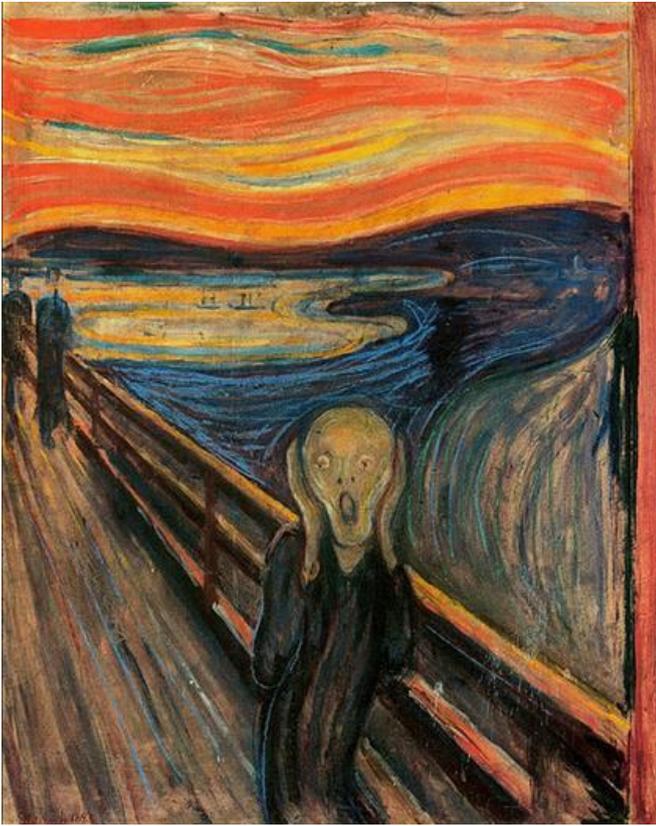
You may like to conclude the session with the Blessing in God of Surprises, below.

God of Surprises! In the Roman Missal there are many options for the Solemn Blessing at the end of Mass. Here is one for use in Ordinary time, and very apt for praying in this, the final 'Light for the Path' session.

May the Lord bless you and keep you. R. Amen

May he let his face shine upon you and show you his **mercy**. R. Amen

May he turn his countenance towards you and give you his peace. R. Amen



<https://www.google.co.uk/search?q=wikicommons+art&espv=2&biw=1366&bih=667>

Edvard Munch, 'The Scream'.

For each picture:

What might it be like to be in this picture? Where would you be? 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, when have you or someone close to you have suffered pain – mental or physical? How do you see the world when you are suffering? How do you see Jesus? How do you see the people of the community? How do they see you?

How can we be more aware, and be actively supportive of people who are wounded or suffering in any way, in our families, and in the parish and wider community? What about people who are isolated, homeless, in prison, or living in poverty? How can we help any one of these?



https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/65/Jakub_Schikaneder_-_All_Souls'_Day.jpg

An old widow standing in a graveyard on All Souls Day, remembering those she has loved and lost