



Homily – Second Rite of Reconciliation (Year of Mercy)

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St Mary's Cathedral, Perth
Tuesday, 15 March 2016

If you are wondering what you are going to say to the priest this evening when you make your Confession, one suggestion I would make is that, as well as considering the points we will soon reflect on in our examination of conscience, you allow yourself to sit quietly with the words from tonight's Gospel reading: they provide us with a very practical way of evaluating just how we are living our day-to-day lives.

The words are quite simple, but they carry great weight. Jesus tells us that we should not judge, we should not condemn, we should forgive, and we should give generously. And He sums it all up by simply saying, *"Be merciful, just as your Heavenly Father is merciful"*.

In this Year of Mercy, it would be a wonderful thing if we, as individuals and as communities of faith, could put this call to be merciful just like our Heavenly Father at the very centre of our lives. We have come here to the Cathedral this evening to allow God to draw us into the great mystery of His boundless mercy. In doing so, we are also implicitly committing ourselves to being signs and bearers of this same divine mercy to others.

While a merciful person will obviously be known by the things he or she does, or refrains from doing, mercy is really a thing of the heart. Sometimes we can use our actions to disguise what we most deeply believe - but it is within our hearts that we discover who we truly are. The person who donates large sums of money to charity - but who does so out of his or her surplus and who is primarily seeking recognition for his or her generosity - might be thought to be a merciful person. But does the image correspond to the reality? Do the actions manifest what lies in the heart? Surely it is not primarily what we do, but rather why we do what we do, which is the real measure of our sincerity and, indeed, of our humanity.

To be a merciful person - to have a merciful heart - this is a gift from God. This is why one of the most beautiful prayers for forgiveness in our tradition, found in Psalm 50, contains these words: *"a pure heart create for me, O God, put a steadfast spirit within me"*. A similar thought is found in the Prophet Ezekiel, where God assures His people that He will remove from them their hearts of stone and give them hearts of flesh instead.

This is our prayer tonight: that God, in His great mercy and compassion, and out of His love for us, would remove our hearts of stone and give us hearts of flesh - merciful, forgiving, generous hearts - so that we can truly be children of our Heavenly Father, whose name, as Pope Francis reminds us, is "Mercy".



The heart has always been a powerful symbol in our Catholic tradition. We need only to think of the devotion to the Sacred Heart to realise how true this is. Every page of the Gospels unfolds for us the mystery of Jesus who, in His life and in His death, reveals the face and the loving heart of God to us. In this Year of Mercy, I have found myself reflecting on this central truth of our faith and have found myself drawn very much to the idea that Jesus reveals to us what we might call the large-heartedness of God.

We all know instinctively what a large-hearted person looks like and what a large-hearted person does - and why. We also know instinctively if we are ourselves really large-hearted people. Tonight, we come to acknowledge the ways in which our hearts of stone manifest themselves in our day-to-day lives. Let us make this our confident prayer this evening: that the Lord will take away from us our hearts of stone and give us hearts of flesh instead.