

Preaching Resources

CRS HOMILY RESOURCES FOR SELECT SUNDAYS AND FEASTS IN THE EXTRAORDINARY JUBILEE OF MERCY

by Fr. Ron Chochol

INTRODUCTION

The following resources draw on images and insights found in *Misericordiae Vultus*, the Bull of Indiction of Pope Francis for the Jubilee Year of Mercy, and on the mission and work of Catholic Relief Services. They are designed to assist the preacher in relating the Scriptures for the days selected to our individual and community practices of mercy during the Jubilee Year. Each reflection has a brief summary of the Gospel for that day (from Year C), an **image of mercy**, an illustration from the mission and work of CRS, and examples of one or more practices from the traditional list of corporal and spiritual works of mercy.

NOTE: Quotes from the Bull of Indiction are referenced by its initials—MV—and section number and paragraph; e.g., MV #24-2. For further information about the Jubilee Year, consult Jubilee of Mercy, the website sponsored by the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization. Preachers may also want to draw a congregation's attention to the numerous references to God's mercy found in the Eucharistic Prayers, especially the four for Various Needs and Occasions.

DECEMBER 8, 2015

The Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary

On the 50th anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Council, Pope Francis will open the **Door of Mercy** in the Basilica of St. Peter to inaugurate the Jubilee Year. Opening the door not only lets us enter the basilica, but also, more importantly, lets the people of God, touched by the mercy of God in the Word and the bread of life that sustain us, go forth into the world to take up the work entrusted to us, the **pilgrimage of mercy** to all God's children locally and globally. The open doors invite us to move out of our comfort zone, the narrow ways we have become accustomed to. The Gospel for the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception expresses the mercy of God for all people in Mary's being called by God to bear a son to be named Jesus, or "God saves," who will be recognized as Son of the Most High. For mercifully, nothing is impossible for God. In MV #24, Pope Francis refers to Mary as the **Mother of**

Mercy. In giving birth to Jesus, Mary our Mother gives birth to all his disciples. Catholic Relief Services, in our work of mercy around the world, embraces countless numbers of God’s children like a loving mother, drawing on our resources to touch their lives with healing and hope. CRS enables us to go on our pilgrimage of mercy around the world. Today’s celebration is an opportunity to encourage people to adopt **Merciful like the Father** as their own the motto for the Jubilee Year.

DECEMBER 13, 2015

The Third Sunday of Advent

The Gospel for today focuses on the preaching of John in the desert. John says: “Whoever has two tunics should share with the person who has none. And whoever has food should do likewise.” He is inviting us to open our **hands of mercy** to others, not only to fill their hands with food and clothing, but to fill their hearts with respect for their dignity as children of God. On behalf of the Catholic Church in the United States, CRS opens and extends our hands of mercy to help others around the world by feeding and clothing survivors of natural and man-made disasters. In 2014 CRS brought lifesaving disaster relief and recovery to approximately 8.7 million people in 48 countries. At the local level, we can practice the corporal works of mercy by feeding the hungry at homeless shelters or through food pantries, or by clothing the naked by giving our extra clothing to organizations like the Ladies of Charity or the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, which operate thrift stores.

JANUARY 17, 2016

The Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

In the Gospel today—from the Gospel according to John—Jesus is portrayed as turning water into wine at a wedding celebration in Cana in Galilee. By doing so, he performed, or practiced, the first of his signs to reveal his glory and draw out the faith of his disciples. By doing so, Jesus turned what could have been a desert, a wedding without wine, into an **oasis of mercy**. But there would have been no wine without the jugs filled with water. All over the world, CRS turns deserts into oases by digging and maintaining wells or pipe connections so people can have clean sources of water. On a local level, we can practice the corporal works of mercy by passing out bottles of chilled water on hot days to the homeless at local shelters. We can also slake their spiritual thirst by engaging in conversation before they move on.

JANUARY 24, 2016

The Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

In the Gospel today, where we begin readings from the Gospel according to Luke, Jesus enters the synagogue in Nazareth on the Sabbath and is invited to read from the prophet Isaiah. After the reading, Jesus says to those gathered, “Today this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing.” With

their eyes fixed on Jesus, they see the **face of mercy**. Pope Francis in MV #16 comments, “This Holy Year will bring to the fore the richness of Jesus’ mission echoed in the words of the prophet: to bring a word and gesture of consolation to the poor, to proclaim liberty to those bound by new forms of slavery in modern society, to restore sight to those who can see no more because they are caught up in themselves, to restore dignity to all those from whom it has been robbed. The preaching of Jesus is made visible once more in the response of faith which Christians are called to offer by their witness.” Through our work around the world, CRS shows the **face of mercy** to those in need. Whether it be agricultural training, treatment and medication for people with HIV and AIDS, advocating for children and women caught up in human trafficking, promoting community microfinancing and peacebuilding initiatives or responding to emergencies, CRS makes visible the **face of mercy**. In 2014 CRS was active in 101 countries and touched the lives of 85 million people. For those of us on the local level, we might want to review what the corporal works of mercy are: feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, heal the sick, visit the imprisoned and bury the dead. How can we develop practices in ministries and areas where we have not yet ventured?

FEBRUARY 10, 2016

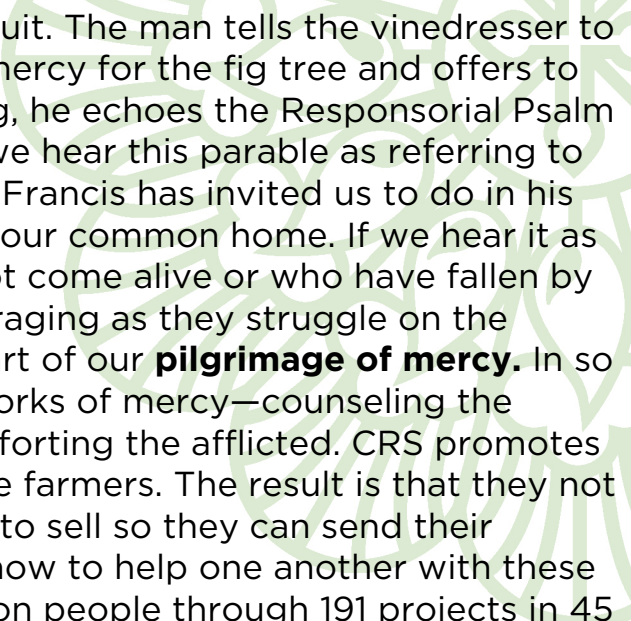
Ash Wednesday

In the Gospel selection from Matthew, Jesus teaches his disciples how to engage in the practices of almsgiving, prayer and fasting: “... so that your almsgiving may be secret.” In MV #17, Pope Francis suggests that “the season of Lent during this Jubilee Year should also be lived more intensely as a privileged moment to celebrate and experience God’s mercy.” Pope Francis also indicates that he will be sending out missionaries of Mercy this Lent to bring the **balm of mercy** through the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation to people throughout the world. We need to be open to this **touch of mercy** that comes to us through the sacrament. While CRS reaches out to people around the world with the **balm of mercy**, we also touch lives here in the United States by giving Catholics in the United States the opportunity to reach out to our neighbors overseas through **CRS Rice Bowl**. CRS Rice Bowl enables us to practice the corporal work of feeding the hungry. We practice mercy by putting the rice bowl on our table and dining in solidarity with people from around the world. By participating in this Lenten tradition, we can discover people whom we would really love to get to know face to face. Whether globally or locally, we can reach out and be in touch with others just as Jesus did. There is also a CRS Rice Bowl app that offers the same daily materials provided by CRS Rice Bowl. There’s even a virtual CRS Rice Bowl!

FEBRUARY 28, 2016

The Third Sunday of Lent

In the Gospel selection, Jesus tells a parable about a man who had a fig tree



that after 3 years was still not producing fruit. The man tells the vinedresser to cut it down. But the vinedresser begs for mercy for the fig tree and offers to help fertilize it for another year. In so doing, he echoes the Responsorial Psalm refrain: “The Lord is kind and merciful.” If we hear this parable as referring to our environment, we can respond as Pope Francis has invited us to do in his encyclical *Laudato Si’* by showing care for our common home. If we hear it as referring to people around us who have not come alive or who have fallen by the wayside, we can be patient and encouraging as they struggle on the journey of life. Our walking with them is part of our **pilgrimage of mercy**. In so doing, we will be practicing the spiritual works of mercy—counseling the doubtful, instructing the ignorant and comforting the afflicted. CRS promotes new agricultural techniques for subsistence farmers. The result is that they not only have enough to live on but also extra to sell so they can send their children to school. The farmers also learn how to help one another with these new techniques. CRS has assisted 6.6 million people through 191 projects in 45 countries with agricultural projects. We serve as a **bridge of mercy** to help people cross over to a healthy and productive life, and to a greater sense of community. On the local level, parishioners or those in retirement centers can volunteer to make sleeping mats out of plastic bags for the homeless. In MV #17-3, Pope Francis asks all the dioceses of the world to implement “**24 Hours for the Lord**,” an initiative to be celebrated on the Friday and Saturday preceding the fourth week of Lent. In offering the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation during this time, priest confessors can and should be “authentic signs of the Father’s mercy.” Pope Francis says: “In short, confessors are called to be a sign of the primacy of mercy always, everywhere, and in every situation, no matter what.”

MARCH 6, 2016

The Fourth Sunday of Lent

Jesus gives us a parable about a father who had two sons to the tax collectors and sinners who were listening to him and to the Pharisees and scribes who were murmuring against him. The father mourns the loss of the son who took his inheritance but welcomes him back with an **embrace of mercy**. The father mourns the refusal of the other son to join in the celebration for his brother’s return by going out and speaking to him with a **voice of mercy**. Since in many dioceses today, this Sunday is when the annual collection for CRS is taken up, it might be helpful to remind people that their contribution is a way to offer an **embrace of mercy** to those CRS serves throughout the world. On the local level, individuals need to be encouraged to offer an **embrace of mercy** and forgiveness to anyone who has offended them or to ask for mercy by apologizing to someone they have offended. Both are spiritual works of mercy.

MARCH 13, 2016

The Fifth Sunday of Lent

This Gospel selection from John tells the story of Jesus, the woman caught in adultery, and the scribes and Pharisees who are testing him. Jesus bends over under the cross of her and their sin, not fulfilling the Mosaic law requiring the woman to be stoned. But he rises up to offer her the healing **medicine of mercy**: “Nor do I condemn you. You may go.” CRS extends the **medicine of mercy** to people, especially in Africa, who are HIV positive or living with AIDS. It has done so in a way that respects and supports them as they try to reenter their communities. CRS also reaches out to survivors of human trafficking, prostitution and slavery. We offer healing for the body but, even more important, spiritual healing for the heart and soul. On the local level, we can practice works of mercy by comforting the afflicted in shelters and recovery centers, working with women who need spiritual and emotional support when they are released from prison or by helping immigrants become integrated into their new life in the United States.

APRIL 3, 2016

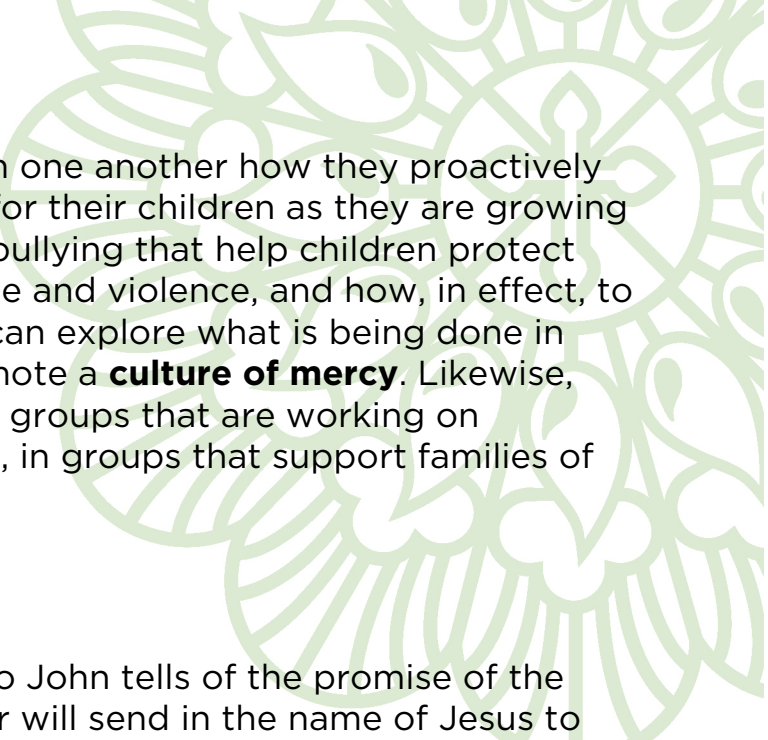
The Second Sunday of Easter—Divine Mercy Sunday

In the Sundays of Easter, we turn once again to the Gospel according to John, here on the evening of the first day of the week after the Crucifixion of Jesus. Jesus appears to his disciples and reveals to them his hands and his side, the **wounds of mercy**. He offers his disciples peace, their mission and the gift of the Holy Spirit—ways to practice the mercy of forgiveness that he offers them and then, through them, to others. These gifts have been handed down to us, gathering us into this tradition of mercy. CRS takes up the work of peacebuilding among people in conflict. It serves as a **bridge of mercy**, inviting enemies to meet in a place and way where they can be safe. On the local level, people can also build **bridges of mercy** by forgiving offenses, being patient with those who harm them, visiting those in prison, and welcoming the stranger and immigrants.

APRIL 24, 2016

The Fifth Sunday of Easter

As Jesus anticipates leaving his disciples, he gives a new commandment: “Love one another. Such as my love has been for you, so must your love be for each other.” In the Jubilee Year calendar, this day is devoted to teenagers, with a focus on constructing a **culture of mercy**. In the weeks preceding this homily, it may be helpful if the preacher spends some time listening to teenagers and their families talk about how they do—or do not—practice works of mercy at home and outside their home, and discovering what challenges they experience in constructing a **culture of mercy**. It may also be worthwhile to



offer families the opportunity to share with one another how they proactively develop attitudes and practices of mercy for their children as they are growing up. In Lebanon, CRS offers workshops on bullying that help children protect themselves against abduction, sexual abuse and violence, and how, in effect, to shape a culture of mercy. Locally, people can explore what is being done in schools, whether public or private, to promote a **culture of mercy**. Likewise, they can be encouraged to get involved in groups that are working on sentencing practices for nonviolent crimes, in groups that support families of people in prison and so on.

MAY 1, 2016

The Sixth Sunday of Easter

The selection from the Gospel according to John tells of the promise of the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in the name of Jesus to his disciples to remind them and us of his departing farewell: “Peace is my gift to you.” In John’s Gospel, “peace” is not simply the laying down of arms. Nor is it just a greeting. It is John’s way of expressing what the other Gospels refer to as “the reign/rule of God.” That is, his abiding presence and power among us and within us. God’s abiding presence through the mystery of the Trinity is the **throbbing heart of mercy**. But this peace of God calls for us to do whatever we can to prevent, stop or reconcile after wars. CRS promotes peace and justice commissions, encourages the role of women in preventing and ending conflicts, helps organize interreligious dialogue, provides trauma healing for those crushed by conflict—especially children kidnapped to become soldiers—facilitates education, jobs and housing for former child soldiers and organizes the reconstruction of housing damaged or destroyed by war. Locally, we can reveal the presence and love of God by reaching out to others through programs that help refugees in our community.

MAY 8, 2016

The Ascension of the Lord

The conclusion of the Gospel according to Luke sees Jesus leaving his disciples with his **hands of mercy** raised up in blessing. They are to preach the remission of sins to the nations. The Alleluia verse from Matthew reassures us that Jesus is with us always. Operating in more than 100 countries around the world, CRS is bringing the hands of mercy to people in need, irrespective of their race, religion or culture. On our behalf, the CRS staff models the Good News by their works. Their hands reach out to work with and for others, bringing mercy to people not only materially but also spiritually. Participating in the work of CRS enables us to practice all the corporal works of mercy. Working together locally, we can experience how God’s mercy touches our hearts as we help those who need food, clothing, shelter, job training, support and encouragement, and any of the many other needs of body, mind and spirit.

JUNE 5, 2016

The Tenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

With this Sunday, we resume the continuous reading of the Gospel according to Luke. Jesus, upon seeing a dead man being carried out of the town he is approaching, is moved with pity for his widowed mother. He reaches out and touches the litter carrying the man, calling upon him to get up. Although, according to Mosaic law, Jesus' touching the litter is ritually contaminating, he crosses over this zone of restriction to show his **heart and hands of mercy**. He brings life not only to the son but also to the mother who would have been abandoned. In many places in Africa, CRS has brought people back to life by providing much-needed care and medication for those affected by AIDS. Widows infected by their husbands have been able to once again work their small farms and care for their families. Many of them have in turn reached out to help other widows living with AIDS. CRS, through 134 health projects, brings healing and hope to 58 million people in 43 countries. We too can reach out with mercy to those in our own parishes and neighborhoods who are burying their dead. We can do this by walking with them and praying for their beloved family members, a corporal and spiritual work of mercy.

JUNE 12, 2016

The Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

If we use the long form, there are many works of mercy shown in the Gospel today. The woman known around town as a sinner shows mercy to Jesus by washing his feet with her tears and anointing them with perfumed oil, as she anticipates his death. Jesus shows mercy to Simon, the Pharisee, who was his host, by reminding him of his failures in traditional hospitality. Jesus shows mercy as he announces that the woman's sins have been forgiven by God. He shows mercy to the other guests by announcing this mercy to her publicly. And finally, he shows mercy to the 12 apostles who accompany him—as well as to Mary from Magdala and the other women—by uniting them all in this **divine mission and mystery of mercy**. The people who carry out the mission of mercy that is the work of CRS report not only on the works of mercy they do for others in the name of the Catholic Church in the United States but even more strikingly on how their lives have been touched by the people they are helping. This is truly the **mystery of mercy**. For us here at home, this can be our experience when we reach out to people in need through soup kitchens, food pantries, visiting their homes, restoring or building their houses, sitting and listening to their stories. Through these corporal and spiritual works of mercy, we can find ourselves being touched by the divine **mystery of mercy**—not what we were expecting at all.

July 10, 2016

The Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

The Gospel today starts with a problem and an answer. It ends by turning our world upside down. The story of the Good Samaritan, which Jesus uses to answer the question of the man trained in the Mosaic law as to who is his neighbor, has become one of the most well-known in religious literature. It shows us the **face of mercy** on the last person the Jewish victim would have expected it from. The story also shows us that we are entering the **mystery of mercy** when we realize that “neighbor” is not a passive object, a noun, but rather a dynamic source for others; that is, a verb. When we are grasped by that conversion, we are caught up in the great **mystery of mercy**. And that is what CRS does. On our behalf, it becomes a neighbor to others wherever, whenever they are in need. CRS not only helps others, but also enables them to become life-giving neighbors to others in their own communities. Thus we can begin to see the corporal and spiritual works of mercy not as burdens, but as spiritual blessings.

JULY 24, 2016

The Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

The Gospel for this Sunday offers many **gifts of mercy** for those who open their hearts to the God and Father of the Lord Jesus, who is the source of mercy. Jesus shows us how our lives will be touched by divine mercy when we practice mercy toward others. CRS is present to and works with millions of people around the world. We are always ready to respond immediately and generously to those overwhelmed by natural disasters or the effects of human violence. Sometimes we can find ourselves challenged to move out of our comfort zone to help others. We can see this as a burden, or as an opportunity to offer **gifts of mercy** to others. The corporal and spiritual works of mercy are genuine opportunities given to us by God.

AUGUST 7, 2016

The Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

The Gospel reading for today, whether the long or short form, offers us images of how to be truly human in God’s eyes. But the first paragraph, in the long form, is particularly striking. It addresses those of us who are fearful of threats, violence or even people who are different from us. Jesus reassures us that we have no need to fear anything, since our Father has given us everything we need to live a deeply human life. This mercy of God is a never-failing treasure. And then Jesus tells us how to live a fully human life: “For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be.” If we have a **heart of mercy** as the Father

does, our lives will be a treasure for others, and ourselves. If we take the time to go to the CRS website, we will find our treasure—the people around the world whom we have the opportunity to serve. We will be inspired by their stories of faith, hope, love and endurance. Although we will be not be able to see them up close and personal, we can see others who are like them in our own towns and cities. Engaging in the corporal and spiritual works of mercy locally will enable us to open our **hearts of mercy** to our global neighbors.

AUGUST 21, 2016

The Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time

Whether we consider the “narrow door” to salvation or the door that the master of the house locks to keep out evildoers, we are given an image of the **doors of mercy**. This image reminds us of how the Jubilee Year of Mercy began last December when Pope Francis opened the doors of mercy at the major basilicas in Rome. We can enter through these doors wherever we are. But more important, we can open **doors of mercy** to help others around the world through CRS. We support educational programs for AIDS orphans that open doors to a better future. And we encourage people around the world to start Savings and Internal Lending Communities, which offer a safe place to save small sums of money, and a fair and reliable place to get loans so families and communities can become self-sufficient. At home we can open **doors of mercy** by working with ex-offenders who are trying to start a new life. And we can encourage others to open doors for them through work, housing and dignity.

SEPTEMBER 4, 2016

The Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time

The Gospel today makes it quite clear that Jesus insists that we give up everything we hold valuable to us. But, we think, what are we left with? Being a disciple of Jesus! What does that involve? It involves taking up our cross and following him. We tend to think of our cross as burdens imposed on us, like sickness. But our real cross is offering what will help others lead an authentic human life. Our cross is offering others our **hands and feet, and hearts of mercy**. CRS puts boots on the ground around the world so people can become self-sufficient—and then pay it forward. Since the day after this Sunday is Labor Day in the United States, we may want to consider how we can help people who are unemployed or underemployed. Without useful employment, people begin to devalue themselves and to slowly but surely give up on life. By reaching out to them through corporal works of mercy, we can be **hands and feet, and hearts of mercy for them**.



SEPTEMBER 18, 2016

The Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

The upshot of this Gospel selection is: “No servant can serve two masters ... You cannot serve God and mammon.” Called to receive the greatest gift there is, the gracious presence and power of God, we are blessed by this endless mercy. But given the reality of life, we are also called to get our priorities straight: money for ourselves or mercy for others—in imitation of how God has treated us. This choice is one that can open or close the **door of mercy**. CRS’ projects and programs help individuals walk through previously closed doors and draw others into new lives. When we work with people in need in our communities, we open up doors for others, and help them learn how to provide for others. For all too many, their locked doors are spiritual, reflecting their feelings of not deserving God’s love and mercy. Our commitment to them can open the **door of mercy** for them—something money cannot buy.

OCTOBER 9, 2016

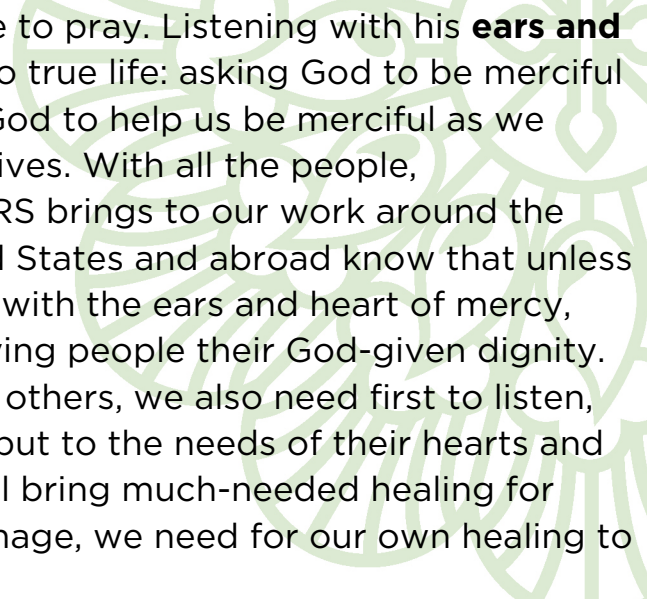
The Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time

The Gospel today invites us to meet some people whom, if we lived at that time, we would have run or driven away from. But even from a distance, Jesus was able to hear the lepers with his **ears of mercy**. He responded to their pleas by sending them on their way to the Temple priests. But one returns to follow Jesus. Jesus blesses his faith and sends him on his new way, to do for others what Jesus did for him—opening **ears of mercy**. In our work with survivors of human trafficking, mostly women, CRS gives special attention to the fact that although survivors may be freed from captivity, they are not yet free of physical, psychological and spiritual traumas, much less shame and rejection. CRS staff listens to their hearts with **ears of mercy**. Although we are inclined to think of human trafficking as a problem in other parts of the world, the reality is that there are thousands of children and adults in the United States who are caught up in this perverse abuse of human dignity. We may want to keep our ears of mercy open to how we may be able to protect and heal them.

OCTOBER 23, 2016

The Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

In the Gospel for today, Jesus speaks with power about self-righteousness and contempt for others through his portrayal of a Pharisee and a tax



collector who have gone up to the temple to pray. Listening with his **ears and heart of mercy**, Jesus shows us the way to true life: asking God to be merciful as we are honest about our lives, asking God to help us be merciful as we listen to others being honest about their lives. With all the people, organizational skills and resources that CRS brings to our work around the world, leaders and staff here in the United States and abroad know that unless they listen to the people they are serving with the ears and heart of mercy, they will be exalting themselves and denying people their God-given dignity. Here at home, when we reach out to help others, we also need first to listen, not just to what their material needs are, but to the needs of their hearts and spirits. This may take more time, but it will bring much-needed healing for them and for ourselves. For on our pilgrimage, we need for our own healing to listen with the **ears and heart of mercy**.

NOVEMBER 6, 2016

The Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Drawing on an ancient Jewish practice designed to fulfill the male responsibility to provide children to a woman brought into the family, the Sadducees challenge Jesus with what appears to them a conundrum. Jesus rejects their challenge and graces them with a significant **word of mercy**: “God is not the God of the dead but of the living. All are alive for him.” In our work around the world, CRS sometimes faces incredibly difficult challenges. Sometimes we are inclined to give up, to say there is no hope. But that would be to forget and even deny that God is the God of the living and that no matter how bad things look, everything is alive for him. For the people CRS is working with and for, these are truly **words of mercy** that sustain us in impossible situations. Sometimes, we too can feel overwhelmed. That is when we need to acknowledge that we also need help from others; even more, we need a life-giving **word of mercy** from the God of the living.

NOVEMBER 20, 2016

The Solemnity of Christ the King

We have reached the end of the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy. In the Gospel for today, Jesus is portrayed at the end of his life, as he is dying on the Cross. Even then he has a **word of mercy** for a condemned criminal who calls upon him to be remembered when he enters on his reign. From his **heart of mercy** that will shortly be pierced, Jesus assures the criminal of eternal life with him. He opens the **door of mercy** for him. This **word of mercy** reaches

out to us over the centuries and reassures us of God's love, which comes to us through his Son and Servant Jesus. Today Pope Francis will seal the Jubilee Door at the Basilica of St. Peter. But although that physical door is sealed, we have been empowered by the Holy Spirit to keep open the **doors of mercy** to all who call upon us, to continue our **pilgrimage of mercy**. In so doing, we will find the **doors of God's mercy** always open to us. May this divine embrace of mercy bring abiding peace to our hearts!