

VAIHARAI
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A Theological Half-Yearly

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VAIHARAI

Mercy - Need of the Hour

From Editor's Desk

It gives me immense pleasure to greet the readers of *Vaiharai*, a theological Half-yearly, as I take up the responsibility of its Editor.

I take this opportunity to thank Dr Xavier Terrence and Dr P.S. Sebastin and Dr S.P. Johnson for having rendered wonderful service as editor and co-editors of *Vaiharai*, while discharging their duties as professors of St. Paul's Seminary.

I express my special thanks to Dr Xavier Terrence who has been the Editor of *Vaiharai* for the past two years, for having initiated the work for this issue and given us a beautiful Guest Editorial on the year of Mercy.

As per the decision taken at the meeting of the Seminary Council held on 27th October 2016, Dr Raphael and Dr Dionysius have been selected as associate editors of *Vaiharai*. I offer them my hearty congratulations and welcome them to extend their whole hearted co-operation to me in this regard.

As we are approaching the end of the Year of Mercy may our deeds of compassion be a continuous journey towards the renewal of the entire world. Let us resolve to build up the Kingdom of God by being the salt, light and yeast of the world through our acts of mercy.

Dr. A. Albert
Editor

Guest Editorial

St Basil the Great in his *Homily during the Times of Famine and Drought* condemns those who were insensitive to the plight of the poor as the fiercest of fierce beasts and considers him/her a sacrilegious person and a murderer (No. 7). For St Augustine, an act of mercy is an acknowledgement of Christ in the life of a believer (Sermon, 239:7). Therefore, Christian life without mercy becomes a mockery of Christian identity. The source of mercy is God Himself. He announces to Moses, "The LORD, The LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" (Ex 34:6; Cf. Deut 4:31). Mercy and graciousness are the primary expressions of God towards the chosen people. This resulted in the confidence of the people to return to Him and approach the source of life. They strived *to know* Him more (Hos 6:1-3). The true knowledge of God will guide us to live like Him. Pope Francis has invited each Christian to participate in God's own knowledge of himself (*Lumen Fidei*, 36). Through this participation Jesus encourages us to "Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful" (Lk 6:36). The celebration of the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy will be incomplete if one does not approach to participate in the knowledge of God and not approach the neighbour after the manner of God.

In the first approach, each Christian, despite living in the context of material gain and consumerism, should enthusiastically and joyfully say like the wounded Israelites "let us know, let us press on to know the LORD" (Hos 6:3). For Paul, the power of knowing the Law became nothing in

front of knowing Jesus. It is the knowledge of Jesus, which helped him to reach out to all. The knowledge of Jesus helped Paul to become like Jesus in his life and death (Phil 3:8-10). Pope Francis encourages us first to know and acknowledge the generosity of God before becoming generous (*Misericordiae Vultus*, 14). In this year of Mercy, we approach God to experience His mercy towards us above all in the forgiveness of all our sins because “God’s forgiveness knows no bounds” (*Misericordiae Vultus*, 17, 22).

In the second approach, each Christian should try to live like God in one’s relationship with one’s neighbour. This does not rest merely in momentary act of mercy in this jubilee year. It surpasses beyond the material act into the act of heart in forgiving the neighbour. St Augustine says, “alms are not a very helpful remedy, unless the remedy of reconciliation is also added” (*The City of God*, 21:27). Pope Francis has proposed seven corporal works of mercy and seven spiritual works of mercy (*Misericordiae Vultus*, 15). But he culminates his recommendations in the act of Jesus on the cross, the words of forgiveness spoken by Jesus, the supreme expression of mercy towards those who crucified him (*Misericordiae Vultus*, 24). The final prayer of Jesus on the cross “Father forgive them, for they do not know what they do” (Lk 23:34) becomes a model for all of us.

Whom did he forgive? Jesus forgave those who conspired against him, handed him over to the religious and the civil authorities, mocked at him, spat on him, scourged him, crowned him with thorns, mounted the cross on him, dragged him to Calvary, crucified him, insulted

him by casting lot on his cloak, the onlookers who enjoyed the scene and the one who is to pierce him with a lance in a moment of time! How did he forgive? Jesus forgave them even before any one of them could feel sorry and ask for forgiveness. None of them knelt before him to ask pardon; none of them expressed in one way or other their regret over what they have done to him; none of them was penitent! Yet Jesus forgave them even before they could ask for it. This indeed is the style of Jesus and therefore should become the style of Christians. True Christian forgiveness is forgiving the offender even before he / she regrets. Jesus did not only preach to love the enemy (Mt 5:44) but also lived it (Lk 23:34). This act indeed will make us the children of God (Mt 5:45).

Approaching God is easy. Is it easy to approach our neighbour after the manner of Jesus? The seven corporal works of mercy and the seven spiritual works of mercy might be part of our living this Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy. However, as St Augustine says, are we ready to add the remedy of forgiveness? One may give the excuse, 'though Jesus was fully human, he was also the Son of God; so he could do it. I am not like him.' Nevertheless, to strengthen us after the style of Jesus, we have a few biblical models. Esau was cheated by Jacob his younger brother twice. When Esau was famished, Jacob made a business out of it and coveted the elder's birthright (Gen 25:29-34). The hunger of the elder brother became an opportunity of business deal for the younger brother! Again, Jacob robbed Esau off his firstborn's blessings (Gen 27:1-29). Cunningly, Esau the firstborn was reduced to be a slave to his younger

brother (Gen 27:40), though it was the plan of God (Gen 25:23). Now the human emotions run wild in the mind of Esau and he has decisively decided to kill his younger brother who has cheated him twice (Gen 27:41). Jacob runs for life. After many years, Jacob returned to his hometown still fearing that his elder brother might kill him. But, the gesture of Esau caught Jacob by surprise. Abandoning his earlier decision to kill, Esau embraced Jacob and kissed him (Gen 33:4). This forgiving gesture of acceptance of the cheating brother by the one cheated made the face of the forgiving one like the face of God to the offender who was forgiven (Gen 33:10). The face of Esau who suffered became like the face of God to Jacob who made him suffer, just because Esau forgave Jacob and showed favour to him. Similarly, Joseph did not take revenge over his brothers for what they had done to him. However, Joseph was in a position to take revenge but he forgave them and encouraged them not to feel sad over their earlier acts of jealousy. Rather, he found God's plan in the plot of his brothers and was able to tell, that it was God who sent him to Egypt to save life through the jealousy of his brothers (Gen 45:5). The father of the prodigal son did not wait for the offending son to recite the 'act of contrition' prepared by him; even before he could recite it the father embraces and kisses him (Lk 15:20). All these three forgave the offenders even before they expressed their regret and sorrow. None of them demanded legal justice to soothe their wounds and hurts!

This remedy of forgiveness needs to be lived from this Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy. Thus, we allow this remedy of forgiveness to become the medicine of mercy,

which will surely heal the many wounds of many neighbours, even of the relatives and friends who may have now become strangers. Corporal and spiritual acts of mercy are important; but they become Christian when we add the remedy of forgiveness, forgiveness after the manner of Jesus on the cross. Let us conclude this Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy with this resolution. To whom am I going to show my face like the face of God?

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