

# ON MERCY

## EVERY SINGLE MOMENT IS AN ACT OF MERCY

*"When I think of the many evil things I have done, wretch that I am, I tremble at the fearful day of judgment, but trusting in Your loving-kindness, like David I cry out to You. Have mercy on me, O God, according to your great mercy."<sup>1</sup>*

While I was preparing my self and arranging the thoughts to write on the philokalic topic "Mercy," I received an email<sup>2</sup> that fixed me in front of myself and threw me in the midst of the subject. The email was an essay on Heaven, written by a teenager. Instantly, it detached me from the present moment and forced me to look eschatological, while, yet, I am in the Pentecostal time.

In one honest and violent moment, I was ripped off from all knowledge and words. I was astonished, ashamed and bewildered, and immediately, I knelt crying: Lord, have mercy on me. Through this sudden email, which its content was already proclaimed in Scripture and by the Fathers of the Church; I was faced with my true sinning reality, which escape my awareness during the daily challenges of life.

The email was an eschatological preview of my hypocrisy and things that I have done, said, murmured, dreamed, smelled, saw, touched and etc. Although, the readings of the Triodion cycle that the Church is celebrating these days, which purpose is to prepare the self prior to embark into the pilgrimage of Lent, should have shaken me and made me shout with the Publican and the Prodigal son: Lord, have mercy, but my indulgence in my Pharisaic<sup>3</sup> and inheritance<sup>4</sup> satisfaction kept my soul indifferent to the Church's message. The satisfaction in my status has blinded me from acknowledging the commandment of love and mercy that were entrusted to me, for showing the love of God through merciful acts, which are revealed in the remaining readings of the Triodion cycle, the parable of the "Last Judgment"<sup>5</sup> and of the "Forgiveness Sunday."<sup>6</sup>

Hence I count this email as an act of mercy from God indeed. It allowed me to recognize, once and for all, that I am embraced, engulfed, wrapped and encompassed by mercy and that every moment is a

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<sup>1</sup> From the Matin Service of Lent.

<sup>2</sup> Look at the end of this booklet.

<sup>3</sup> The satisfaction of the Pharisee in his fulfillment of the law in the "Pharisee and Publican" parable, Luke 18: 9-14.

<sup>4</sup> The satisfaction of the elder son in his father's inheritance instead of recognizing the blessedness in the presence of the father who is the inheritor, in the "Prodigal Son" parable, Luke 15: 11-24.

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 25: 31-46 "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me."

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 6: 14-21 "If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

reflection of the presence of mercy. This moment is indeed a moment of mercy. It is an opportunity to ask for and receive mercy.

But unfortunately, the mercy is dwelling in me and my being is unaware of it and of its true role. The Scripture and the Church's teachings remind me all the time of my true calling. However sometimes, I need a moment of honesty and truth to ignite the fire that may enlighten the world if it is directed outwardly to the people of God. Alas, most of the time, this fire is burning me because I am keeping it hidden inwardly for not distributing the received mercy; I shall become a transparent vehicle of God's mercy.

### **ETYMOLOGY**

The translations of the word mercy are Eleos *ἔλεος* in Greek, Rahmah *رحمة* in Arabic, and Kheh'-sed *חַסְדִּים* or Rachamim *רַחֲמִים* in Hebrew. Mercy as defined in *Wikipedia* "can refer both to compassionate behavior on the part of those in power, or on the part of a humanitarian third party. Mercy is a word used to describe compassion shown by one person to another or a request from one person to another to be shown such leniency or unwarranted compassion for a crime or wrongdoing." According to the same source, mercy is derived from "Middle English, from Anglo-French *merci*, from Medieval Latin *merced-*, *merces*, from Latin, "price paid, wages", from *merc-*, *merx* "merchandise."<sup>7</sup> The late Pope John Paul II, in his encyclical letter "Dives in Misericordia" (Rich in Mercy, 1981), defines it as "Mercy is love's second name," and he taught that mercy is "the greatest attribute of God."<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile "Fr. George Kosicki, CSB, the great Divine Mercy evangelist, once summed up the meaning of this Latin word as follows: misericordia means 'having a pain in your heart for the pains of another, and taking pains to do something about their pain.'"<sup>9</sup>

### **Eleos**

Antony M. Coniaris<sup>10</sup> says that the best description of the word mercy is found in the book "Orthodox Worship" which declares: "The word *mercy* in English is the translation of the *Greek* word *eleos*. This word has the same ultimate root as the old *Greek* word for oil, or more precisely, olive oil; a substance which was used extensively as a soothing agent for bruises and minor wounds. The oil was poured onto the wound and gently massaged in, thus soothing, comforting and making whole the injured part. The

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<sup>7</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mercy>

<sup>8</sup> Transliterated from <http://thedinemercy.org/library/article.php?NID=37>

<sup>9</sup> Copied from <http://thedinemercy.org/library/article.php?NID=37>

<sup>10</sup> He is a prolific Orthodox writer, and also President of Light and Life Publishing house.

*Greek* words for 'Lord, have *mercy*,' are 'Kyrie, eleison' that is to say, 'Lord, soothe me, comfort me, take away my pain, and show me your steadfast love.' Thus *mercy* does not refer so much to justice or acquittal, a very Western interpretation, but to the infinite loving-kindness of God, and his compassion for his suffering children! It is in this sense that we pray 'Lord, have *mercy*,' with great frequency throughout the *Divine Liturgy*."<sup>11</sup>

The olive oil is a natural substance from God's creation. It is a produce of olives, which are the symbol of peace. It is processed by human sweat. It is not created ready made. Although olives exist, its soothing and healing characteristics have to be produced, processed and requested. Thus, it is the signification of its liturgical use. It is given to the newly baptized through the sacrament of Chrismation in order to elect him/her a member of the complete body of Christ and to make him/her a royal priest. Here where the oil is seen as the ultimate act of mercy.

### **Kheh'-sed and Rachamim**

In Hebrew however, the word *Kheh'-sed*, which is translated to mercy in English, does not literally mean mercy.<sup>12</sup> It means steadfast love. The word *Rachamim* is also used to signify mercy. The following is a good explanation of the use of the two words and their meanings.

"When in the Old Testament the word 'hesed' is used of the Lord, this always occurs in connection with the covenant that God established with Israel. This covenant was, on God's part, a gift and a grace for Israel...God had made a commitment to respect it...[this divine '*hesed*'] showed itself as what it was at the beginning, that is, as a love that gives, love more powerful than betrayal, grace stronger than sin." The second most common word for God's mercy in the Old Testament is the Hebrew word *rachamim*: tender, compassionate love, a love that springs from pity. *Rachamim* is often used in conjunction with *hesed*. It comes from a root word "rechem," which means a mother's womb. Thus, there is a special intimacy and responsiveness about this kind of love, and a special concern for the sufferings of others."<sup>13</sup>

### **Rahmah**

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11 Copied from <http://www.goarch.org/ourfaith/ourfaith7124>

12 This website <http://www.sacrednamebible.com/kjvstrongs/CONHEB261.htm#S2617> registers the various verses where the word *kheh'-sed* means mercy, loving kindness and etc.

13 <http://thedivinemercy.org/library/article.php?NID=37>

This brings us to the Arabic word Rahmah رَحْمَة. This word is not related to oil,<sup>14</sup> but as Rachamim it is derived from Rahm رَحْم, which means the womb. The meaning of the word can be understood from what the womb symbolizes. The womb is the place where the baby is generated, formed and lives dependently on the mother's gracious will. It is the place where the mother takes care, unconditionally and totally of her foetus, until he/she can breathe the air of the outside world. It is the place of countless mercies where a new life is created and developed in the inner being of the mother who will live in expectation to meet her born baby with joy. If the mother wishes to harm what is in her womb, she has to harm herself at the same time. The two are in oneness. Besides, God, "Allah", took a name for himself from the root Rahm. In the Qur'an, God is called *Al-Rahman Al-Raheem*. This means that God is the Most Merciful who has unconditional mercy for the whole of His creation. It is worthy to note that this name attributed to Allah was not new in the Qur'an; it was used by Christians and Jews prior to Islam.<sup>15</sup>

### **"MERCY" IN THE PHILOKALIA**

The lovers of God's Beauty, the Philokalic Fathers, have experienced mercy intimately and personally, and as such, they talked about it. The creation is engulfed with God's mercy, but only those who experienced it and mould themselves by it can illustrate its gracious and hidden mysteries. Mercy can be illustrated like the Rahm, the womb, and like the pouring of oil. The former, the Rahm of the woman is always there, but only the baby can make it valuable. The baby who is engulfed in and by it feels its importance and allows the woman to become a mother who reveals her love in extraordinary and incomprehensible actions of mercy. The latter, the Eleeo, is always ready to smooth the pain and the injury of the injured. Without the acceptance of the injured, the oil will not be poured on the wound to be healed and to soothe the pain.

The Philokalic Fathers were those newborns who experienced the ambiance of the Rahm and those injured, who experienced the healing process. They transliterated their experiences of healing, completeness and perfection, which allowed us to reflect on the mercy of God and guided us in its application. Their life-long was a ceaseless request and experience for and of God's mercy. They did not

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<sup>14</sup> The sound of the Arabic word Rahm can be attributed to the word Rah'm رَهِم which means soothing oil. As far as I know, no one has made this connection. It needs deeper research. For this reason I am satisfied in stating the only above-mentioned meaning.

<sup>15</sup> Recently Father Pecerrillo, a famous Franciscan Archeologist, found more than twenty churches in Madaba at the south of Jordan. From the Fourth Century we found houses in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Palestine with this inscription in Arabic: "Bismi Allah al-Rahman al-Raheem." From <http://www.answering-christianity.com/allah6.htm>

ask for their rights as ascetic followers, but their unceasing prayers were a constant demand and longing for His mercy. They thought that Mercy is the only thing they deserve, though they lived an ascetic life in accordance to God's commandments, and relatively became transparent means for His mercy. They saw themselves as sinners, broken, fallen, wounded and unworthy of a glance from Him; but because He is love, they trusted only in His mercy and they transmitted the experiences of His mercies that were received, in each moment of their life to the whole creation.

The English Philokalia, in its four volumes, does not recount a direct passage referring to God's mercy, but rather, it describes the merciful human being. Indirectly, the passages hint and reveal the Divine mercy. The Philokalic Fathers describe the role of the merciful human being according to his potentialities and capabilities, and as such, they teach and live. Man is in the image of the Triune God. The potentiality of his humanity is in accordance with the above and comes from the above. The merciful human being has to be seen and act in assimilation of God's mercy, revealed in the beginning, in the salvific history of the Incarnated Son of God, and in the Pentecostal era in which the Church lives eschatologically.

### **Mercy is the Manifestation of Love**

The passages from the Philokalia concerning mercy, though few, guide us to the Mercy of God. Although the mercy of man is only a drop of water in the ocean of God's mercy, and although, this mercy is only recognized and actualized by man due to his experience of God's mercy, the Philokalic passages pave a highway for man to reach the optimum of mercy.

St. Peter of Damaskos says: "The merciful man who performs his acts of charity by drawing on his possessions remains within the bounds of nature, and does not go beyond them as does the person who deliberately gives away all he possesses."<sup>16</sup> Further on, he says: "The merciful person is he who gives to others what he has himself received from God, whether it is money, or food, or strength...at the same time he considers himself as a debtor, since he has received more than that he is asked to give." But for Peter, it is not enough to give all what the person possesses because "everything is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights."<sup>17</sup> The person has to give up himself for the other. He should be like the Lord Jesus Christ. He has to imitate Christ in showing mercy. He says: "He gives not only his

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<sup>16</sup> *The Philokalia, the Complete Text*, compiled by St. Nicodimos of the Holy Mountain and St. Makarios of Corinth (London, Boston, Faber and Faber,) Vol. III, p. 83.

<sup>17</sup> The prayer behind the Ambon from the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom.

possessions but even his very life for his neighbor.”<sup>18</sup> The person who does not own any possessions can still be merciful; “Not that it is necessary, of course, to have property in order to show mercy. Possessions, rather, are a great weakness. Indeed, it is better to have nothing to give and still to be full of sympathy for all.”<sup>19</sup>

The descriptions of St. Peter of Damascus lead us to imitate Jesus Christ in His merciful actions. The person who has to make his love manifest through the acts of mercy. It is similar to the salvific history of the Incarnation, Inhumanity, Crucifixion, Resurrection and Ascension, which they were Love in Action and in such, God was showing and sowing His Mercy. Mercy is the actualization of Love. It is the Incarnation of love. It is its manifestation. The human being can show and sow God’s love and mercy by giving more than he/she possesses freely. This manifestation is the natural act of humanity, which is created in the Image and likeness of God.

### **Mercy is Forgiveness.**

St. Ilyas the Presbyter proclaims this mercy differently. He says: “A truly merciful person is not one that deliberately gives away superfluous things, but one that forgives those who deprive him of what he needs.”<sup>20</sup> This is another dimension of mercy. Mercy here goes beyond the self, possessions and actions. It transcends everything, even the herald actions of martyrdom, because it detaches itself from any condition, witness, reason, situation and it culminates to reach the true meaning of mercy as the attribute of God. The mercy of forgiveness to those who hurt us, without expecting to receive in return, draws us near to God. It allows us to become God-like. The more we act mercifully, the more we approach the quality of God. God forgives freely and naturally, not out of obligation, but out of His Being as Love. God is love and as such He operates. God forgave Adam who rejected Him and has sent His Son in order to bring Adam back to his original and potential place. Ilyas explains by saying: “In those whom mercy and truth prevail, everything is godlike; for truth judges no one without mercy, while mercy never manifests compassion apart from truth.”<sup>21</sup>

### **Mercy Makes God-likes.**

Mercy is very crucial to our theosis, deification. God’s mercy makes it possible for us to become gods and in our acts of mercy we, through our ascetical life, become God’s like. Mercy allows us to discover and uncover God within us. It manifests our true mission and ministry. Ilyas the Presbyter stresses the

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<sup>18</sup> *The Philokalia, the Complete Text*, compiled by Dt. Nicodimos of the Holy Mountain and St. Makarios of Corinth (London. Boston, Faber and Faber,) Vol. III, p. 96

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, P. 37.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

fact that the soul will be purified through its actions of mercy. He says: “The body cannot be purified without fasting and vigil, the soul without mercy and truth, and the intellect without contemplation and communion with Him.”<sup>22</sup> Mercy also produces humility, which is the foundation of the realization of the true status of the self. Humility opens our eyes to our unworthiness of the great mercy of God and forces us to ask for mercy. Mercy for St. Philotheos of Sinai precedes all virtues. He says: “Mercy and truth precede all other virtues. They in their return produce humility and so discrimination.”<sup>23</sup> For St. John of Damaskos “Mercifulness” is the fruit of the four cardinal virtues of the soul: courage, moral judgment, self-restraint and justice.”<sup>24</sup> And for Gregory of Sinai it converts anger into joy. He says: “Nothing so converts anger into joy and gentleness as courage and mercy. Like a siege-engine, courage shatters enemies attacking the soul from without, mercy those attacking it from within.”<sup>25</sup>

### **Mercy is Healing.**

On the other hand, St. Maximos the Confessor, asks us to work on ourselves and show mercy to ourselves first in order to reveal in us “the image of God.” He strikes our attention and directed it to our inner beings because mercy prepares the being to recognize God’s mercy and then it allows its energy to spread towards the others. For St. Maximos man cannot show mercy towards the others if he cannot show mercy on himself first. Man has to heal first the schism in him. He has to repair the relationship between his self-love and the love of the others and to use his cleverness in accordance with God’s wisdom. In such way, man renders mercy to himself. He heals his fragmented person and unifies it and thereafter, this mercy unifies him with God. “The self-love and cleverness of men, alienating them from each other and perverting the law, have cut our single human nature into many fragments...Thus any one who has succeeded by sound judgment and nobility of intelligence in resolving this anomalous state of our nature, has shown mercy to himself prior to showing it to others; for he has molded his will and purpose in conformity to nature...; and through them he has revealed in himself what it means to be “in the image of God.”<sup>26</sup>

The passages from the Philokalia reflecting Mercy, illumine the way for man to become in the image of God. For Mercy allows us to give up ourselves for the others, turns anger into joy, produces humility and discrimination, purifies our souls, and renders us to become god-like.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., Vol. II, p. 334.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., Vol. IV, p. 214.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., Vol. II, pp 173-174.

## **“MERCY” IN SCRIPTURE**

From Scripture, man sees that God’s mercy is engulfing the creation as the Rahm is surrounding the baby. God is waiting anxiously, like the mother, for the deliverance of man. This deliverance is the Resurrection of man unto the eternal mercy. Man has to cover those who meet him with mercy as the Good Samaritan who went the extra step by providing care for the wounded man.<sup>27</sup>

Although the English word mercy appears 272 times according to the New King James Version, the word mercies 35 times and merciful 35 times, mercy reveals its operation through the great events of God’s movement throughout man’s history from the moment of the creation of time, during the Pentecostal time in expectation of Eschatological time and the Promise of the second coming.

The guideline for man’s mercy can be extracted from these great events: Creation, Incarnation, Inhomination, Ascension, Resurrection and Pentecost. Also, man can grasp the works of mercy from each word of Holy Scripture and in each moment of his life. He has to be attentive to these specific operations of mercy, though they can not be discussed here for the limited length of the essay.

### **Mercy is a Self-Initiative Action towards the Other – Creation is an Act of Mercy.**

If man was not created, he will not be experiencing, acknowledging and expressing God’s love. In his ability to sense, feel and understand man can detect the mercy of God. He can access and share out this mercy in and with everything. Scripture, the explanatory experience of the people with God, is showing this mercy from the beginning of time when God created man out of nothing, *Ex-nihilo*. This creation is The Act of Love and Mercy. Man became a being in the image and likeness of his Creator. Man was not a thing and mercifully God bestowed him with a great role. The responsibility to love, create and act mercifully.

This Free Act of creation reveals to man the true meaning and the ministry of mercy. The creation of an “other” willingly, freely, and deliberately, the making of this “other” in the same image and embedding him with the same qualities that God has, are the directives for man to attain in order to show real mercy. As such, man has to vision mercy and to act accordingly. Mercy, therefore, is a self-initiative action towards the other with respect, honor, integrity and love, which is fulfilled with complete joy regardless of rewards, consequences and reasons. Man shall see the other as God Himself sees him. The other is God Himself<sup>28</sup> and as such he should be shown mercy.

### **Mercy is Seeking the Other – Incarnation is an Act of Mercy.**

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<sup>27</sup> Luke 10: 30-37.

<sup>28</sup> The reading of the Last Judgment Sunday, Matthew 25: 31-46.

This same mercy continues to reveal itself through the pages of Scripture from which man is enlightened and is kindled to minister mercifully. Man learns from the history of God with His creation, that the proper way to show mercy is by keeping it in his mind and showing or representing God's mercy as opposed to his own. His actions should be ceaselessly merciful.

Although, man has rejected God and went on his own way without his counsel, God sought man in every action. He even sent His own Son. The Uncreated and Invisible God became visible because of His mercy. The merciful man should not wait for some one to knock on his door to show him mercy, but he should seek the other and chase him to bring him back to his own original self. He should go out to the highways and hedges<sup>29</sup> and search all kind of people, show them mercy, and compel them to come and enter the house of the Lord. He should even leave his home and go to the wilderness in search for him, not returning unless he finds him and share his joy with his neighbors.<sup>30</sup>

### **Mercy is Kenosis κένωσις**

Emptying one self<sup>31</sup> as Jesus Christ's action of *Kenosis* for the other ascends us to the above and beyond level of mercy. In such way, man himself becomes actual mercy and a source of healing by giving all of him for the sake of the other. It is not what he possesses, but it is his own self that is counted because the other is in need of the affections, the presence, the smile, the touch, the ear, the support and the acknowledgment of his integrity, personality and humanity. Man in his mercy, becomes the liturgical being for the other. He offers himself on behalf of the other. He becomes the other's being and lifts up his suffering and joy, his life.

### **Mercy is Persistent Care for Ultimate Healing – The Ministry of Christ on Earth, Inhominaton, is the Unceasing Act of Mercy.**

Throughout Scripture we learn more and more about mercy. God's interaction and interferences<sup>32</sup> in man's history in the Old Testament reveals His mercy actions through His caring for the creation. Although, God is not visibly in the midst of the creation, He is always trying the impossible to lead man and to deliver him from his improper status. Man is always present in God's womb. Therefore, mercy is keeping always the other in one's thoughts and in his being. Mercy forces man to find all kind of possibilities, even seeking the impossible, to deliver the other from his iniquities. Man searches for the various methods, ways, organizations and other men to restore to the other his true image and identity.

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<sup>29</sup> Luke 14:23.

<sup>30</sup> Luke 15: 1-7, and Matthew 18: 11-14.

<sup>31</sup> Philippians 2: 7.

<sup>32</sup> God's interferences through prophets and historical events.

Though the other rejects man's efforts of mercy, the man should try constantly to approach the other for the benefit of both. In such way, both will be approaching towards God.

The Inhomination of the Son of God amidst the creation teaches us the practical actions of mercy. Jesus Christ demands from His disciples to "Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give."<sup>33</sup> So, mercy is commanded to be given constantly and without restriction and expectation of benefits. It is an outreach, a go and do the impossible because man cannot raise the dead and cast out demons, though man learns that this impossibility becomes possible<sup>34</sup> through God. Mercy is doing the impossible ceaselessly in the name of God, through His name and for His name and as such, mercy is fulfilled.

The earthly life of Christ shows that mercy is a walking person among the others seeking them in his teachings, presence and actions. The others will be looking forward to see this merciful walking man. They want to touch the hem of his garment,<sup>35</sup> climb the tree to see him<sup>36</sup> and follow him anywhere<sup>37</sup> he goes neglecting their bodily nourishment because they are certain that he will take care of them.<sup>38</sup> He, on the other hand, does not wait for them to ask for healing or their needs, but he foresees it and supplies it.

#### **Mercy is Carrying the Cross of the Other - Crucifixion is an Act of Mercy.**

The Crucifixion of Christ lifts up man from the Cross. Jesus Christ's mercy went to the extreme in order to deliver man from his distorted image. He suffered and became the martyr par excellence to resurrect man. Mercy, therefore, is that step beyond the normal and the regular. It is to put on the misery of the other and lifting it up from his being. It is to die in compassion for the sake of the other and defend him to get back on his feet and rise and walk<sup>39</sup>.

#### **Mercy is Giving Hope and Finding Alternative Sources – Ascension is an Act of Mercy.**

Man continues to learn what mercy is and how he shall conduct it through the main stations of the life of the Incarnated Son of God. The Ascension is the mercy of hope to man. It gives man the strength to look up and hope in the above. The eyes of man will be raised to the highest where there is neither sorrow nor pain but eternal life with the Lord of Mercy. Therefore, the work of mercy is to give hope by the ascension from all material attachments and to direct the heart towards the true treasure.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Matthew 10: 8.

<sup>34</sup> Matthew 19: 26, Luke 1: 37 and 18: 27.

<sup>35</sup> Matthew 9: 20 and Mark 6: 56.

<sup>36</sup> Luke 19: 4

<sup>37</sup> Matthew 4: 25.

<sup>38</sup> Matthew 14: 14-21.

<sup>39</sup> Luke 5: 23 and John 5: 8.

<sup>40</sup> Matthew 6: 21 and Luke 12: 34.

The mercy of hope leads man to receive alternative solutions - sources of mercy. As the Ascension gave the way for the pouring of the Holy Spirit and the indwelling of a new life, hope allows man to discover his life again and injects it with new life. The Ascension also teaches us that the merciful man shall provide alternative sources to the other when he departs. The merciful man takes care of the other while he is away too. He makes sure that the care continues in his absence as it was in his presence.<sup>41</sup>

### **“MERCY”IN CONCLUSION**

The experience of man with the Triune God, His creator, reveals that mercy is love in action. It is an unceasing self-initiative movement towards the other. Thus God has shown man His love and, as such, He commanded him to love his neighbors as himself,<sup>42</sup> and even his enemies.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, man should direct his mercy inwardly, outwardly and to the farthest and unreachable extent.

Nevertheless, man breathes the mercy of God and it envelops him. His being is a proof of this mercy and everything that is surrounding him speaks loudly about it. Man will not survive and will not have any hope or sense of presence and purpose of life without this mercy. Mercy is that man needs. It benefits him first. When he begs for God’s mercy because of his unworthiness, God’s abundant mercy fills him and opens to him the doors of repentance.<sup>44</sup>

Mercy surrounds us like the Rahm and it heals us like Eleeos. It is always with us. It can be seen, observed, experienced and practiced every moment and through everything. Christians meditate about it in the Creation, Scripture, Art, Physics, and Technology and in every breadth of life and they see these as actions of mercy. They celebrate it in the services of the Church and receive it through the Holy Sacraments. They practice it with the deeds and prayers. Being merciful is part of their faith and it is the consequence of the commandment of Love. Christians by their mercy show their love to God, themselves, neighbors, others and enemies. By their mercy they will be known Christians because their mercy exceeds any other mercy. It is from God. It is infinite and endures forever.<sup>45</sup> It reaches the unreachable and is not limited to human conditions and limitations. The Christian offers himself for the mercy of the other.

Mercy is our martyrdom; it is our witness and our ministry.

O Lord, Have mercy on me and save me.

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<sup>41</sup> The Good Samaritan ; Luke 10: 30-37.

<sup>42</sup> Matthew 19: 19, Mark 12: 31 and Luke 10: 27.

<sup>43</sup> Matthew 5: 42 and Luke 6: 27

<sup>44</sup> From the Lenten Orthros.

<sup>45</sup> Psalm 136: 1.

The mercy of God is an ocean divine,  
a boundless and fathomless flood.  
Launch out in the deep, cut away the shore line,  
and be lost in the fullness of God.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Words: Albert B. Simpson, 1891. from <http://www.cyberhymnal.org/htm/m/e/mercygod.htm>.

## A TEENAGER'S VIEW OF HEAVEN

17-year-old Brian Moore had only a short time to write something for a class. The subject was what Heaven was like. "I wowed 'em," he later told his father, Bruce. "It's a killer. It's the bomb. It's the best thing I ever wrote." It also was the last. Brian's Essay: The Room...

In that place between wakefulness and dreams, I found myself in the room. There were no distinguishing features except for the one wall covered with small index card files. They were like the ones in libraries that list titles by author or subject in alphabetical order. But these files, which stretched from floor to ceiling and seemingly endless in either direction, had very different headings. As I drew near the wall of files, the first to catch my attention was one that read "Girls I have liked." I opened it and began flipping through the cards. I quickly shut it, shocked to realize that I recognized the names written on each one. And then without being told, I knew exactly where I was.

This lifeless room with its small files was a crude catalog system for my life. Here were written the actions of my every moment, big and small, in a detail my memory couldn't match. A sense of wonder and curiosity, coupled with horror, stirred within me as I began randomly opening files and exploring their content. Some brought joy and sweet memories; others a sense of shame and regret so intense that I would look over my shoulder to see if anyone was watching.

A file named "Friends" was next to one marked "Friends I have betrayed." The titles ranged from the mundane to the outright weird "Books I Have Read," "Lies I Have Told," "Comfort I have Given," "Jokes I Have Laughed at ." Some were almost hilarious in their exactness: "Things I've yelled at my brothers." Others I couldn't laugh at: "Things I Have Done in My Anger", "Things I Have Muttered Under My Breath at My Parents." I never ceased to be surprised by the contents.

Often there were many more cards than I expected. Sometimes fewer than I hoped. I was overwhelmed by the sheer volume of the life I had lived. Could it be possible that I had the time in my years to fill each of these thousands or even millions of cards? But each card confirmed this truth. Each was written in my own handwriting. Each signed with my signature.

When I pulled out the file marked "TV Shows I have watched", I realized the files grew to contain their contents. The cards were packed tightly and yet after two or three yards, I hadn't found the end of the file. I shut it, shamed, not so much by the quality of shows but more by the vast time I knew that file represented.

When I came to a file marked "Lustful Thoughts," I felt a chill run through my body. I pulled the file out only an inch, not willing to test its size and drew out a card. I shuddered at its detailed content.

I felt sick to think that such a moment had been recorded. An almost animal rage broke on me. One thought dominated my mind: No one must ever see these cards! No one must ever see this room! I have to destroy them!" In insane frenzy I yanked the file out. Its size didn't matter now. I had to empty it and burn the cards. But as I took it at one end and began pounding it on the floor, I could not dislodge a single card. I became desperate and pulled out a card, only to find it as strong as steel when I tried to tear it.

Defeated and utterly helpless, I returned the file to its slot. Leaning my forehead against the wall, I let out a long, self-pitying sigh.

And then I saw it. The title bore "People I Have Shared the Gospel With." The handle was brighter than those around it, newer, almost unused. I pulled on its handle and a small box not more than three inches long fell into my hands. I could count the cards it contained on one hand.

And then the tears came. I began to weep. Sobs so deep that they hurt. They started in my stomach and shook through me. I fell on my knees and cried. I cried out of shame, from the overwhelming shame of it all. The rows of file shelves swirled in my tear-filled eyes. No one must ever, ever know of this room. I must lock it up and hide the key. But then as I pushed away the tears, I saw Him.

No, please not Him. Not here. Oh, anyone but Jesus. I watched helplessly as He began to open the files and read the cards. I couldn't bear to watch His response. And in the moments I could bring myself to look at His face, I saw a sorrow deeper than my own.

He seemed to intuitively go to the worst boxes. Why did He have to read every one? Finally He turned and looked at me from across the room. He looked at me with pity in His eyes. But this was a pity that didn't anger me. I dropped my head, covered my face with my hands and began to cry again. He walked over and put His arm around me. He could have said so many things. But He didn't say a word. He just cried with me.

Then He got up and walked back to the wall of files. Starting at one end of the room, He took out a file and, one by one, began to sign His name over mine on each card. "No!" I shouted rushing to Him. All I could find to say was "No, no," as I pulled the card from Him. His name shouldn't be on these cards. But there it was, written in red so rich, so dark, so alive. The name of Jesus covered mine. It was written with His blood. He gently took the card back. He smiled a sad smile and began to sign the cards. I don't think I'll ever understand how He did it so quickly, but the next instant it seemed I heard Him close the last file and walk back to my side.

He placed His hand on my shoulder and said, "It is finished." I stood up, and He led me out of the room. There was no lock on its door. There were still cards to be written.