

**“...who brings out of his treasure both what is old and what is new” (Matt 13:52)**

**Concluding Reflections on the C.P.P.S. Spirituality Week 2015 of the Teutonic Province**

**“Spirituality of the Precious Blood: Source and Expression of Mercy”**

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Preparations for the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy announced by Pope Francis presented the opportunity to reflect anew on our spirituality of the blood of Christ, and such was the purpose of this symposium. Mercy is, to be sure, a central theme of the Christian life. What does it mean, on the one hand, to look at the world anew through the lens of mercy and, on the other hand, to revisit themes of our spirituality from the perspective of mercy?

Mercy is, first of all, an essential characteristic of God. It is the revelation of the boundless love of God. Our gaze upon mercy is often shaped by our view of justice (for justice is also one of the chief characteristics of God). Regarding justice, one must always keep before one’s eyes the two Hebrew concepts of *sedaqa* and *mishpat*, both of which we could translate with the word “justice.” *Sedaqa* refers to maintaining the relations between God and creation that God has intended—that is, between God and human beings, human beings with one another, and human beings with the entirety of creation. Thus, when one speaks of justice and mercy of God, we are speaking of God’s unbounded love of all creation. *Mishpat* refers to the human legal order as given in a juridical system. Justice as mercy in this manner is therefore something measured out, a “mercy” that a judge grants to someone in place of deserved punishment according to the law. Often in everyday usage, this is what we mean by mercy in this narrower sense when we juxtapose mercy and justice.

There are three characteristics that mark the exercise of God’s mercy in the Christian life: generosity, reliability, and empathy.

“Generosity” reflects the infinite goodness and love of God. It manifests itself in us through Professor Clemens Sedmak called in his plenary address a “wideness in our heart” of hospitality and the capacity to make room for others and to expand the spiritual space in which we live. It is expressed also in our *metanoia*, our capacity to turn ourselves around in conversion, but also in our ability to see beyond the current state of things, to gain new perspectives. It means, therefore,

achieving new points of view in our encounters with people who think and act differently from ourselves.

“Reliability” mirrors the faithfulness of God, especially in situations that are changing rapidly and situations that even have become chaotic. The message of being reliable sounds like this: “We are staying here with you, even if everyone else is leaving. We won’t leave you in the lurch.” [Note: the C.P.P.S. Symposium was being held in Salzburg as thousands of refugees were streaming through the city from Syria and the Middle East every day.] Professor Sedmak called this, a “firm and steady heart.” This firmness of heart is also the fruit of contemplative prayer, the encounter with the “still point” at the very heart of creation. Practicing contemplative prayer and engaging in adoration are also very important in a ministry of reconciliation—learning to wait on God, waiting on the way God brings about reconciliation.

“Empathy” is the capacity to feel one’s way into the lives and the worlds of others. Empathy is something God has for all creatures, and is manifested to us especially in the Incarnation. In empathy we show a capacity for vulnerability, in our own lives and also (perhaps especially also) for what happens in the lives of others. Clemens Sedmak spoke here of a “heart that is warmed” by the vulnerability it encounters. This divine empathy is given expression in a church that goes forth as a community as missionary disciples (Pope Francis).

Generosity, reliability, and empathy have to be key characteristics of our ministry as Missionaries of the Precious Blood. Our communities, our houses are to be “gateways of mercy” in which people encounter the face of the Father’s mercy—Jesus Christ. The corporal and spiritual works of mercy should be emphasized in our ministry, as they were in lives and ministries of St. Gaspar and St. Maria De Mattias.

As Christian men and women, we have the task of reading the signs of the times (or the “cry of the blood”). In the course of the symposium, we have engaged ourselves with the variety of these signs that are already manifested in our ministries: in the family, in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and in many other areas. For us in Europe, two of the major signs that we now encounter are the care for the environment and the refugee crisis. Reflections on these two urgent situations need to be part of our considerations of our spirituality.

We also reflected again on the “precious” in our name and in our spirituality. Being “precious” takes on new significance when we think about our need to protect the environment. The words of the psalmist come to mind here: “For he delivers the needy when he calls, the poor and those

who have no helper. He has pity on the weak and the needy. From oppression and violence he redeems their lives, and precious is their blood in his sight.” (Ps 72:12-14).

We turn now to the principal biblical symbols of our spirituality:

The new *covenant* sealed in Christ’s blood remains for us the call to solidarity with all those who live on the peripheries of our society. When viewed from an ecological perspective, this means solidarity with the entirety of creation. And it goes without saying that we must find ways to welcome the refugees into our common home. Living in solidarity means likewise promoting the meaningfulness of life.

The *cross* is the place where we encounter the suffering of the world—but not just suffering, but also forgiveness and the transformation of suffering. The plenary presentation of Professor Hanna-Barbara Gerl-Falkovitz led us to engage more extensively the processes of forgiveness (both for victims and for wrongdoers).

The *cup* has been a symbol with many meanings in our spirituality, and our reflections on mercy expanded that even further. The cup is a symbol of the destiny that God has measured out for us. It is likewise the cup of suffering, in which all our afflictions are brought together. But it is also the eschatological cup of blessing that encourages us in hope to imitate Christ in his work of liberation, reconciliation, and mercy. And finally, it is participation in life of Christ and sign of the participation of all people and all of creation in the common home of the Father.

Reflection on mercy called forth a fourth biblical symbol: that of the *lamb* of the Book of Revelation. In the lamb, the paradoxes and even the contradictions of the struggle with the current signs of the times are held together. The lamb—slaughtered and seemingly conquered yet now alive and victorious—stands for us as a sign of the faithfulness of God in spite of all the indications of defeat, hopelessness, and meaninglessness. The lamb has achieved the redemption of the 144,000 through his blood, and remains for us source and expression of the power of the mercy of God in our world.

Mercy is now to become for us a regular part of our spirituality and a conscious part of our ministries, drawn as it is out of the treasure of our heavenly Father.