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## A FIFTH MARK OF THE CHURCH?

**Abstract.** In addition to the four marks of the Church, *mercy* has been emphasized since the pontificate of St. John Paul II as essential to the authentic fulfillment of the Church's identity and mission. A Christological and pneumatological understanding of these marks of the Church leads to a proper grasp of the Church in relation to mercy. The Church is merciful not *de facto* because of her works of mercy on behalf of the poor or sinners. Rather, she is first the recipient of unprecedented Divine Mercy, poured forth in the gift of the Holy Spirit, and so shares that same Spirit of Mercy with others through her sacraments, preaching, and service. The Church's mission of mercy thus extends beyond the myriad of manners to alleviate human misery. In union with Christ, her Bridegroom, the Church is to communicate the one gift of Divine Mercy, the Holy Spirit, to all.

**Keywords:** mercy; Church; mark; Holy Spirit; mission.

## INTRODUCTION

In reciting the Nicene Creed, Christians profess belief in the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. “These four characteristics, inseparably linked with each other, indicate essential features of the Church and her mission.”<sup>1</sup> Yet, since the pontificate of St. John Paul II, there has been increasing emphasis upon another, essential characteristic of the Church: merciful. In the encyclical *Dives in misericordia*, St. John Paul II wrote: “The Church lives an authentic life when she professes and proclaims mercy—the most

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<sup>1</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (United States Catholic Conference, 1997), no. 811. From here forward, it will be abbreviated by CCC in the text.

stupendous attribute of the Creator and of the Redeemer—and when she brings people close to the sources of the Savior’s mercy, of which she is the trustee and dispenser.”<sup>2</sup> More recently, Pope Francis, in the bull *Misericordiae vultus*, furthered this description of the Church: “Her life is authentic and credible only when she becomes a convincing herald of mercy. She knows that her primary task, especially at a moment full of great hopes and signs of contradiction, is to introduce everyone to the great mystery of God’s mercy by contemplating the face of Christ. The Church is called above all to be a credible witness to mercy, professing it and living it as the core of the revelation of Jesus Christ.”<sup>3</sup>

Both St. John Paul II and Pope Francis emphasize that mercy is the *sine qua non* of the authenticity of the Church’s life according to Gospel. While not naming *mercy* as a mark of the Church, such emphatic language indicates that *mercy* becomes a *quasi litmus* test of her fidelity to her mission. While there is no current theological discussion of adding merciful as a fifth mark of the Church, it is nonetheless important to investigate further this essential attribute of the Church that expresses her mission. To do so, this article will investigate several questions for the sake of grasping more fully what it means for the Church’s identity, life and mission to be merciful. What is the relationship between Divine Mercy and the Church? Is the Church merciful because of her *de facto* pastoral response to the needs of the poor and of sinners? What in fact is Divine Mercy? Is mercy one particular aspect of her life? How does it express her mission?

## 1. A PNEUMATOLOGICAL MARK OF THE CHURCH

First, we must turn to the theology of the marks of the Church. The sole Church of Christ is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. Yet, these four marks are not possessed by the Church of herself; the Church does not make herself holy by her own activity. Rather, it “is Christ who, through the Holy Spirit, makes his Church one, holy, catholic, and apostolic, and it is he who calls her to realize each of these qualities” (CCC 811). The source of her holiness is found in Christ, who imparts His own holiness to the Church through the

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<sup>2</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical *Dives in misericordia* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1980), no. 13.

<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis, Apostolic Letter *Misericordiae vultus* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015), no. 25.

Holy Spirit. This mark of holiness, received first as a gift in the Holy Spirit, achieves maturity only when it bears fruit in the holiness of the baptized. While only faith is capable of recognizing that the source of these marks is found in Christ, nonetheless, manifestations of her marks (such as holiness manifested in the lives of canonized saints) aid human reason to believe in the Holy Spirit who imparts these qualities to the Church (CCC 812). The same holds true for the mark of mercy.

The Church is first made merciful because she is the primary recipient of Divine Mercy. Christ, by imparting the gift of the Person of the Holy Spirit to the Church, makes her merciful and so calls her to realize this quality through her entire life and ministry. This precludes the *a posteriori* argument that, since those in need (the poor, the sick, sinners, etc.) exist, the Church is merciful on account of her performance of the works of mercy. Rather, the Church is merciful because she abundantly shares with others that same Divine Mercy that she herself has received from Christ in the Holy Spirit through the Paschal Mystery.

The theology of the marks of the Church thus centers upon Christ who imparts these qualities through the Holy Spirit. Each mark has its Christological and pneumatological aspect. That Jesus is the Messiah entails that He is the Anointed One. His Anointing is the Holy Spirit, who anoints Him in His Body and Soul. To be Christian means to be an anointed one in Christ, to share in His singular anointing of the Holy Spirit given to the Church. “For the whole Spirit of Christ is in the head, the whole Spirit is in the body, and the whole Spirit is in each of the members” (CCC 797). Just as the Father anointed the body of Jesus with the Holy Spirit during His earthly life, so Christ continually pours forth this Anointing upon His mystical Body, the Church, during her earthly pilgrimage. The one anointing of the Holy Spirit is poured forth upon the one Body of Christ. Just as this anointing of the Spirit constitutes Christ as the merciful high priest (Heb 2:14-18), so in the same manner, this anointing endows the Church with mercy, of which she is first the recipient (trustee) and then the giver (dispenser), as described by St. John Paul II.<sup>4</sup> In this, the Church follows the pattern of Mary as Mother of Mercy: “Mary is mother of mercy, not only because ‘she obtained mercy in a particular and exceptional way, as no other person has,’ but also because she ‘made possible with the sacrifice of her heart her own sharing in revealing

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<sup>4</sup> John Paul II, *Dives in misericordia*, no. 13.

God’s mercy.”<sup>5</sup> In imitation of the Mother of Mercy, the Church is called to reveal and share, through word, sacrament, and service, the mercy of Father that she herself has received through Christ and His Paschal Mystery.<sup>6</sup>

In and through the Holy Spirit, this mercy is given by Christ to the Church: “Indeed, it is to the Church herself that the ‘Gift of God’ has been entrusted...” (CCC 797). Poured forth into human hearts, the Holy Spirit “permits man to perceive Christ’s mercy and adhere to it, while enfolding him within the arms of the Church. The Church, as the unity of redeemed humanity, is the place where God’s mercy lets itself permanently be seen.”<sup>7</sup> The Church herself is thus the fruit of the unlimited mercy of the Father. Just as the Incarnation—the creation of the human body of Christ—is the work *par excellence* of the Spirit, so the prolongation of the Incarnation—the Church—is also the work of the Spirit.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, the Church becomes a sort of sacrament—a visible, efficacious sign—of Christ’s mercy: one cannot conceive of Divine Mercy without speaking of the Church as the place where it is “permanently seen,” proclaimed, experienced, and shared in the Spirit of Christ. “The Holy Spirit, so to speak, crystallizes divine love in the Church so that whoever encounters this life is able to experience it from within and enters into its never-ending richness.”<sup>9</sup> For the Spirit’s work of bestowing mercy is intrinsically linked to the Church, for “where the Church is, there also is God’s Spirit; where God’s Spirit is, there is the Church and every grace” (CCC 797).<sup>10</sup> Where the Spirit is, there is the Church and the Father’s mercy poured out through Word, sacrament, service, and the common, fraternal life.

The historical dimension of Divine Mercy—as revealed in the Paschal Mystery of Jesus of Nazareth—is broadened to every time and place by the Church as the Temple of the Spirit. The “Holy Spirit extends Christ’s mercy to every time and place by generating a dwelling place, a ‘new temple,’” the Church.<sup>11</sup> The presence of the Holy Spirit makes the Church the “temple of

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<sup>5</sup> Antonio Lopez, *Gift and the Unity of Being* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014), 281. See John Paul II, *Dives in misericordia*, no. 9.

<sup>6</sup> Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas est* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2005), no. 25.

<sup>7</sup> Lopez, *Gift and the Unity*, 279.

<sup>8</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical *Dominum et vivificantem* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1986), no. 50.

<sup>9</sup> Lopez, *Gift and the Unity*, 281.

<sup>10</sup> Irenaeus of Lyons, “Adversus haereses,” 3, 24, 1, in *Patrologia Graeca*, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne), vol. 7/1 (Paris: J.-P. Migne, 1857-1886), 966.

<sup>11</sup> Lopez, *Gift and the Unity*, 281.

the living God,” since what “the soul is to the human body, the Holy Spirit is to the Body of Christ, which is the Church” (CCC 797).<sup>12</sup> This bestowal of mercy also constitutes the Church as the People of God, the *assembly* (*ekklesia*) of those called forth and gathered by the Spirit of Christ.<sup>13</sup> Mercy is thus intrinsic to the Church’s very foundation as the People of God: “Once you were ‘no people’ but now you are God’s people; you ‘had not received mercy’ but now you have received mercy” (1 Pt 2:10). The reception of mercy, poured out in the Spirit, constitutes the Church as the People of God. The Church is merciful not primarily on account of her own charitable activity but on account of the action of God, who bestows mercy upon His People by imparting His Spirit to them. This mercy is “manifested in the call that constitutes the Church (*ekklesia*)... Calling the twelve apostles to be with him, and then sending them, he forgives them. He introduces them – who represent the people of Israel and all the peoples of the world – into his own sonship and brings them together. What unites them, then, is having been brought together by this mercy. Their life together, more than family ties or common tastes or ideas, has as its permanent source Christ, who by calling them, forgives each one...”<sup>14</sup> The spiritual bond of mutual love and peace among the baptized is thus concretized in this reception and mutual sharing of this gift of mercy (Eph 4:3). Mercy is at the origin of the *communio* that is the Church.

This *forgiveness of sins* is at the origin of this merciful activity of the Spirit, since the “Spirit himself is the remission of all sins.”<sup>15</sup> Christ Himself illustrated this connection between the gift of the Spirit and the forgiveness of sins on Easter morning: “Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained” (Jn 20:22-23).<sup>16</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Augustine. “Sermones,” 267, 4, in *Patrologia Latina*, ed. Jaques-Paul Migne, vol. 38-39 (Paris: J.-P. Migne, 1844-1864), 1231D.

<sup>13</sup> Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, chap. 2: “On the People of God” (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1964), accessed January 22, 2021, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19641121\\_lumen-gentium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html).

<sup>14</sup> Lopez, *Gift and the Unity*, 282.

<sup>15</sup> *Roman Missal*, Third Typical Edition (Washington: International Commission on English in the Liturgy, 2011) (Prayer over the Gifts for the 7th Week of Easter). Roman Missal.

<sup>16</sup> Giles Emery, *Teologia trynitarna Świętego Tomasza z Akwinu* (Kraków: Dominikańska Biblioteka Teologii, 2014), 416. Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne, 1921), III, q. 85, a. 5; q. 86, a. 6, ad. 2. From here forward, it will be abbreviated by ST in the text.

According to Jeremiah's prophecy, this forgiveness is the distinctive mark of the new covenant, for all shall know the Lord through this merciful pardon of iniquity: "Everyone, from least to greatest, shall know me—oracle of the Lord—for I will forgive their iniquity and no longer remember their sin" (Jer 31:34). However, the merciful activity of the Spirit does not cease with the forgiveness of sins; as noted above, His mercy constitutes the Church as the People of God, the Body of Christ, and His own Temple.

Forgiveness, in English, derives from two root words, having the meaning of "to give completely."<sup>17</sup> Given the pneumatological interpretation of mercy, forgiveness here relates to the total, complete giving of the Holy Spirit to the Church that takes place in and through the total giving of the Son by the Father into the hands of sinners (Lk 24:7). In the Paschal Mystery, particularly in the piercing of Jesus' side (Jn 19:34), the breathing of Jesus on the Apostles (Jn 20:22), and Pentecost (Acts 2:1-41), the Holy Spirit is given entirely to the disciples to gather them into one People, anointed in the Spirit of Christ. Rather than being an impersonal quality of the Church, *mercy* points to the person of the Spirit who dwells within her as His visible Temple, making of her the sacrament of His merciful activity in the world. In her is made visible His presence and activity, and her mission is to extend His Person to every heart and land.

## 2. WHAT IS MERCY?

Any discussion on the Church in relation to mercy begs the most fundamental question: what is mercy itself? Unfortunately, as A. Lopez comments, "The theological term 'mercy' is often reduced through frequent usage to the simple, ontological perpetuation of final existence beyond the singular's death [eternal life] or to a forgiveness that is owed to the concrete singular who repents."<sup>18</sup> Such a reduction of the depth of mercy is problematic, given the foregoing deepening of the understanding of mercy in light of the Holy Spirit. For only a proper understanding of Divine Mercy itself will offer a correct frame of reference for the Church to authentically live her mission as indicated by recent pontiffs.

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<sup>17</sup> *Online Etymology Dictionary*, s.v. "Forgive," accessed January 21, 2021, [https://www.etymonline.com/word/forgive?ref=etymonline\\_crossreference](https://www.etymonline.com/word/forgive?ref=etymonline_crossreference)

<sup>18</sup> Lopez, *Gift and the Unity*, 261.

Quite often, the definition of mercy—given by St. Thomas Aquinas, who follows that of St. Augustine—is either explicitly employed or implicitly presumed in any theological discussion. Aquinas defined the human virtue of mercy (*miser cordia*) as “the compassion in our hearts for another person’s misery, a compassion which drives us to do what we can to help him” (ST II-II, q. 30, a. 1). In reference to Divine Mercy, he explains that a “person is said to be merciful (*miser cors*), as being, so to speak, sorrowful at heart (*miserum cor*); being affected with sorrow at the misery of another as though it were his own. Hence it follows that he endeavors to dispel the misery of this other, as if it were his; and this is the effect of mercy... it does most properly belong to Him to dispel that misery, whatever be the defect we call by that name” (ST I, q. 21, a. 3). This definition classifies mercy according to its effect, namely, the removal of some misery in the one who receives mercy. This is an *a posteriori* definition, which lends to such an *a posteriori* description of the Church as merciful: namely, by the effects of her merciful deeds.

In English, the word mercy strangely stems from the Latin *merx* (wares, merchandise) which is the root of market. Mercy came to English through the French *merci* (reward, gift, kindness, grace, pity). This betrays its origin as indicating the heavenly reward “earned by those who show kindness to the helpless and those from whom no requital can be expected.”<sup>19</sup> The emphasis is here placed upon the hoped-for reward obtained from God in eternal life (Mt 5:7; 6:4; 18:33; 25:40; Jas 2:13), since one receives no such temporal reward from the person to whom one has shown mercy. Mercy is classified according to its effect in the one who practices mercy. In this manner, the English mercy and the Latin *miser cordia* complement each other, describing the effect of mercy both in the giver and the recipient.

Neither of these sufficiently manifest the origin or adequately describe the depth of Divine Mercy. Luigi Giusanni wrote in this regard that “mercy is not a human word. Inasmuch as it communicates itself to man’s experience, mercy is identical to the Mystery from which everything comes, by which everything is sustained, and in which everything ends.”<sup>20</sup> Mercy bursts simple definitions: “The vastness of this word, the borders to which it draws us, cannot be

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<sup>19</sup> *Online Etymology Dictionary*, s.v. “Mercy,” accessed January 21, 2021, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/mercy>.

<sup>20</sup> Lopez, *Gift and the Unity*, 261, quoting Giusanni in Luigi Giusanni, Stefano Alberto, and Javier Prades, *Generare tracce nella storia del mondo: Nuove tracce d’esperienza cristiana*, 3rd ed. (Milan: Rizzoli, 1998), 184.

thought by us.”<sup>21</sup> For mercy is a Mystery, a “synonym for God,” in particular, for the Holy Spirit.<sup>22</sup> For in his encyclical on the Holy Spirit, *Dominum et vivificantem*, St. John Paul II wrote: “Precisely in him [the Holy Spirit] we can picture as personified and actualized in a transcendent way that mercy which the Patristic and theological tradition following the line of the Old and New Testaments, attributes to God.”<sup>23</sup> Divine Mercy is not merely something but rather someone: the Holy Spirit poured into our hearts (Rom 5:5). According to the schemata of the encyclical, the Holy Spirit would thus be not only Person-Gift and Person-Love, but also Person-Mercy, poured forth upon the Church.<sup>24</sup>

Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa furthers this pneumatological understanding of Divine Mercy: “The Holy Spirit, who is love personified in the Trinity, is also the mercy of God personified. He is the very ‘content’ of divine mercy. Without the Holy Spirit, ‘mercy’ would be an empty word.”<sup>25</sup> Divine Mercy is given to man in and through the gift of the Holy Spirit who mediates our relationship to the Father in the risen Christ through His Body, the Church. “The triune God... witnesses to the inexhaustible richness of his merciful power through the Holy Spirit... the Holy Spirit communicates God’s mercy made incarnate in Christ, both within man’s own spirit (John 15:26) and through all flesh.”<sup>26</sup> The reality of Divine Mercy in the Church is the Holy Spirit, poured forth by the Father through Christ, His Son and our Lord.

In *Misericordiae vultus*, Pope Francis wrote: “From the heart of the Trinity, from the depths of the mystery of God, the great river of mercy wells up and overflows unceasingly. It is a spring that will never run dry, no matter how many people draw from it. Every time someone is in need, he or she can approach it, because the mercy of God never ends. The profundity of the mystery surrounding it is as inexhaustible as the richness which springs up from it.”<sup>27</sup> For this great river of mercy that “wells up and overflows unceasingly” from within the Trinity is the Holy Spirit Himself, who is poured

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<sup>21</sup> Lopez, *Gift and the Unity*, 261, quoting Giussani in Luigi Giussani, *La liberta di Dio* (Milan: Marietti 2005), 40.

<sup>22</sup> Lopez, *Gift and the Unity*, 261.

<sup>23</sup> John Paul II, *Dominum et vivificantem*, no. 39.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. John Paul II, *Dominum et vivificantem*, no. 10.

<sup>25</sup> Raniero Cantalamessa, *Gaze of Mercy: A Commentary on Divine and Human Mercy* (Frederick, MD: The Word Among Us Press, 2015), 166.

<sup>26</sup> Lopez, *Gift and the Unity*, 279.

<sup>27</sup> Francis, *Misericordiae vultus*, no. 12.



forth upon all flesh at Pentecost, in fulfillment of Joel's prophecy (cf. Joel 2:28; Acts 2:17). He is the inexhaustible depth of this mystery poured forth from the pierced side of Christ on Calvary and in the sacraments of the Church. For this reason, "The human being could not fully enjoy God's glory without freely participating in the utter spontaneity and bottomless gratuity of God's love as hypostasized by the Holy Spirit."<sup>28</sup> To speak of divine love or mercy without relation to the Spirit is to describe an abstract reality; Divine Mercy becomes real, tangible, and transformative in the Holy Spirit.

Whereas emphasis is often placed upon the *gifts* (plural) of the Holy Spirit, such a pneumatological understanding of Divine Mercy places emphasis upon the *Gift* (singular) of the Holy Spirit Himself. Through Him, all other gifts are given, including relationship with the Father through the Son, which is the essence of the salvation given in Christ.<sup>29</sup> Through the Spirit, we receive the Father and the Son.<sup>30</sup> According to Aquinas, the Holy Spirit – not the Son – is the divine Person closest to us: the Holy Spirit, as the "finger of God" (Lk 11:20) is the point of direct contact of the human heart with God. St. Augustine speaks of this same intimacy of the Spirit to the human spirit: "You were more inward to me than my most inward part and higher than my highest."<sup>31</sup> Christ heals man's multi-form misery with His one Gift of Mercy: the Holy Spirit, as the Gospels witness: the "power of the Lord was with him for healing" (Lk 5:17).

St. Thomas Aquinas affirms this primacy of the Person of the Spirit (as uncreated Grace) over sanctifying or created grace. For there is absolute priority in the reception of the Holy Spirit over His gifts, even though on the side of the recipient, we first need His grace to enable us to receive Him.<sup>32</sup> "Through the gift of sanctifying grace, the reasonable creature is... perfected... to enjoy the divine person himself" (ST I, q. 43, a. 3, ad. 1). In other words,

<sup>28</sup> Lopez, *Gift and the Unity*, 288.

<sup>29</sup> Emery, *Teologia trynitarna*, 258.

<sup>30</sup> Emery, *Teologia trynitarna*, 258.

<sup>31</sup> Augustine, "The Confessions," 3.6.11, *New Advent*, accessed January 22, 2021, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/110103.htm>. In Latin: *interior intimo meo et superior summo meo*.

<sup>32</sup> Emery, *Teologia trynitarna*, 254. "On the side of the recipient... the disposition takes priority over the disposer: in this sense, the receipt of the gifts of the Holy Spirit has priority over that of the Holy Spirit himself, since it is by receiving these gifts that we are conformed to the Holy Spirit. But on the side of the agent and end, priority belongs to what falls closer to the agent and end: in this sense, the receipt of the Holy Spirit has priority over all that of his gifts... and this kind of priority is absolute" (I Sent. D. 14, q. 2, a. 1, q. 2).

the grace of the Holy Spirit is given so that the very source of grace—the Spirit Himself—is bestowed to human hearts. This absolute priority of the Gift over His gifts thus highlights that the greatest mercy possible to man is to possess and enjoy the divine Person of the Holy Spirit after the example of the Son, who Himself experiences the Father’s mercy in His humanity through the Holy Spirit given fully in the Resurrection. His humanity, permeated by the Spirit, pours Him forth upon the Church.

We unfortunately focus often upon the effects of mercy (listed, for instance, in the sequence for Pentecost, *Veni Sancte Spiritus*), or we petition Christ to assuage diverse afflictions that we endure in this mortal life. But this reduces mercy to the sufferings of this present age. How, then, will we be capable of joining the Psalmist in his praises: “I will sing of your mercy forever, Lord proclaim your faithfulness through all ages” (Ps 89:2)? Only a pneumatological interpretation of Divine Mercy emphasizes the inner reality of mercy, which is the possession of the Holy Spirit, which will never pass away, even in the age to come. For the goal of Divine Mercy, shown in this present life, is eternal life in the Spirit, namely, living within the bond of love that unites us to Christ as sons of the Father for all eternity.

Divine Mercy is thus *communio* or *koinonia* with the Father through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. For the original filial relationship of each person to God as Father, constituted by the act of creation, is weakened and denied through sin (ST I, q. 45, a. 3).<sup>33</sup> Through the Holy Spirit and sanctifying grace, this relationship is healed and perfected. For sanctifying grace restores man’s covenantal relationship with God: each human person is created in the Son and filled with Spirit so as to live anew in a conscious relationship with God as Father. The goal of the merciful work of the Spirit is for God to dwell among and within His People (cf. Gen 2:7; Rev 21:22). This focus shifts mercy from a personal effect (of the removal of some individual misery) to the relationship that is healed and restored in the Church. Thus, the Holy Spirit’s primary task is to bring us into communion with Christ so as to make us sons

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. Janusz Królikowski, “Protologia,” in *Dogmatyka w perspektywie Bożego Miłosierdzia*, ed. Krzysztof Gózdź, and Krzysztof Guzowski (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2010), 81-2. Robert Rarron, “The Metaphysics of Coinherence,” in Robert Barron, *Exploring Catholic Theology: Essays on God, Liturgy and Evangelization* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 35: “Operating beyond the categories of substance and accident, Aquinas says that creation is *quaedam relatio ad creatorem cum novitate essendi*, a kind of relation to the Creator with freshness of being”. Cf. Thomas Aquinas, “De potentia Dei,” q. 3, a. 3, ad. 3, in Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae*, vol. 2 (Turin: Marietti, 1965), 43.

with Him of the Father. This communion is effected through the sacraments and above all through the Eucharist.

The Spirit works to bring each person into an encounter with the Lord Jesus, in Word and sacrament, particularly the Eucharist. By being united to Christ and participation in His Paschal Mystery, initiated through Baptism, Christians become a living source of the same Spirit with Christ and in Christ, according to His promise: “Whoever believes in me, as scripture says: ‘Rivers of living water will flow from within him’” (Jn 7:38). Thus, the Church is merciful because she has received this Gift of Mercy in the Spirit and so is called to spread this same Gift to others, through her sacraments, preaching, and service. The Church thus has the mission not only of proclaiming mercy but making the reality of mercy present in the Spirit. For where the Spirit is, every grace and mercy are also present. But only those who live in Christ through Baptism and remain in His love (Jn 15:4) can bear the fruit of love, namely, the Spirit (Jn 15:8) Only those who have received His mercy are capable of sharing it with others. Even more, the only manner of possessing this Gift—after the manner of physical breathing—is by constant, mutual sharing of this same Gift with others. Salvation, rather than being a static, spiritual state of one’s soul, consists in this active participation of man in the merciful work of the Spirit.

### 3. CHURCH AS SACRAMENT OF MERCY

This emphasis upon the Spirit of Mercy thus radically reorients mercy as a mark of the Church. Seen in the light of the foregoing, the Church, as the sacrament of the Holy Spirit, is the visible manifestation of His interior working in the hearts of believers. She is also therefore the sacrament of Divine Mercy. The Church—as the unity of Christians gathered together as one by the Holy Spirit—is the sacrament of His Mercy. The Church is the first to receive the Gift of Mercy that is the Person of the Spirit and is called to convey, transmit, and share that same Gift to all. For the Church is the proper “place” of the work of the Spirit, such that one cannot divide the Spirit—or Divine Mercy—from the Church nor vice-versa.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Stanisław Gręś, *Misja Ducha Świętego w prowadzeniu Kościoła do Paruzji Chrystusa. Studium pneumatologiczno-mariologiczne* (Niepokalanów: Wydawnictwo Ojców Franciszkanów, 2009), 49-52.

To use the word sacrament is to speak of an exterior sign of interior reality of grace. That the Church bears the mark of mercy entails that she is to externally manifest the interior reality of the Holy Spirit within her, and moreover, to convey that interior reality by means of her life and activity. “The Church is called by Christ to crystallize divine love, so that any human being may encounter it. At Pentecost, God confirmed the union of the Christians and makes it a sacramental sign of God’s mercy, which is open to all. The Church, as the dwelling place of Christ, is the most beautiful sign of his mercy.”<sup>35</sup> For the Church has as her mission the communication of God’s mercy: “The Church has been entrusted with the capacity to sacramentally communicate God’s mercy, which she bestows through the different sacraments but also through the other concrete elements that make up her complete form.”<sup>36</sup> According to von Balthasar, the mercy of Christ is made present through the very structure of the Church: “the sacraments, Scripture, the wealth of Christian tradition, the dogmatic deepening of the faith, the hierarchy.”<sup>37</sup> But, at the same time, the life of the Church, the living union of Christians who fulfill the Lord’s commandment of love (Jn 13:34-35; 15:12), represents the “most existentially persuasive, concrete aspect of love.”<sup>38</sup> For since this gift of mercy entails more than mere forgiveness of sins, mercy reveals itself not only in the reestablishment but the full flourishing of relationship among men and between men and God in the Church as a sacrament of unity.<sup>39</sup>

The four marks of the Church thus manifest the effects of the work of the Spirit, the facets of His mercy. For example, the Spirit brings about the Church’s unity through this gift of mercy: “Mercy restores an unknown unity: there is, in fact, no greater unity among men than that born of forgiveness... The unity that forgiveness generates is also incarnated in the daily life of those in the Church.”<sup>40</sup> The mission of the Church is the sacramental manifestation of Divine Mercy, by which the Church acts the instrument of the Spirit. The Church transmits Divine Mercy to mankind in each time and place, in imitation of Christ, who Himself incarnated the Father’s mercy,

<sup>35</sup> Lopez, *Gift and the Unity*, 282.

<sup>36</sup> Lopez, *Gift and the Unity*, 284-5.

<sup>37</sup> Lopez, *Gift and the Unity*, 284-5, quoting Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-logic: Theological Logical Theory*, trans. Adrian J. Walker, and Graham Harrison, vol. 3 (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000-2005), 304-411.

<sup>38</sup> Lopez, *Gift and the Unity*, 284-5.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, no. 1.

<sup>40</sup> Lopez, *Gift and the Unity*, 283.

transmitting it to sinful humanity by the Gift of the Spirit in the Paschal Mystery. The Church is the place where Divine Mercy is received, experienced, and shared among believers (Col 3:12), for such merciful love is to be the mark of his disciples (Jn 13:34-35).

Reflecting upon this pneumatological aspect of Divine Mercy, Fr. Cantalamessa draws a further conclusion: “The title ‘Paraclete’ not only speaks about God’s mercy toward us but also opens for us a whole new field of acts of mercy for one another. We need, in other words, to become Paracletes ourselves! If it is true that the Christian needs to be an *alter Christus*, ‘another Christ,’ it is just as true that he or she needs to become ‘another Paraclete’”<sup>41</sup>. In imitation of St. Paul, the Church is to console others with the same consolation she has first received from God, namely, the Holy Spirit: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and God of all encouragement, who encourages us in our every affliction, so that we may be able to encourage those who are in any affliction with the encouragement with which we ourselves are encouraged by God” (2 Cor 1:3-4). The Greek text makes the connection to the Spirit as the Paraclete even clearer, as the word encouragement in Greek is *paraklesis*. In this task, the Church finds her reflection in Mary, Consoler of the Afflicted and Advocate of Sinners. For this reason, Pope Francis concludes that, “Wherever the Church is present, the mercy of the Father must be evident. In our parishes, communities, associations and movements, in a word, wherever there are Christians, everyone should find an oasis of mercy.”<sup>42</sup> For in each Christian, there should be present the overflowing abundance of the Spirit, of His Mercy, pouring forth generously from their hearts to assuage all forms of human misery. In this way, the salvation promised by Christ to those who believe in Him is already manifested and made concrete.

This theological, pneumatological orientation of Divine Mercy is necessary for a proper understanding of the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. While their immediate goal is the alleviation of a specific misery, their final objective is the communication of the Holy Spirit Himself. In this light, the works of mercy—together with preaching and the witness of faith—dispose the heart, after the fashion of sanctifying grace, to receive Him who is Mercy itself. Without this aspect, then the Church can easily become lost in a myriad of humanitarian, charitable activities, that lose sight of their ultimate purpose.

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<sup>41</sup> Cantalamessa, *Gaze of Mercy*, 173.

<sup>42</sup> Francis, *Misericordiae vultus*, no. 12.

For the Church is called not to be a non-governmental organization (NGO), ridding the world of all suffering for its own sake, although such aid and alleviation of suffering is part of her mission. Rather, the Church's mission of mercy is most potently manifest in her invitation to all to return to living in a filial relationship with the Father possessed by the Son in the Spirit. The Church is to extend the Holy Spirit, Mercy itself, to those whom she embraces; that entails opening her *communio* to others, so that they can experience mercy in the flesh of the mystical Body of Christ. Without this embrace, the works of mercy are incomplete, for they fail to introduce their recipients into the mystery of salvation, which includes the Church as the sacrament of Divine Mercy.

The works of mercy have as their context the orientation of their recipient to a renewed, deepened relationship in Christ with God as Father. For if Divine Mercy is more than merely performing works of mercy, then its goal is to orient human hearts to the Father who alone assuages and comforts our human hearts—with their multiple forms of misery—by the Holy Spirit. In receiving Him as the Gift of Mercy, the Church already has the downpayment of total salvation, where all misery will be definitively removed and all tears dried (cf. Eph 1:14-16; Rev 21:4-8). For our hearts are restless until they rest in Him, and mankind can only find peace in turning to Christ to receive His mercy, overflowing in the Spirit.<sup>43</sup>

Thus, the Church's attribute as merciful cannot be reduced to simple, sometimes "extra," actions. Rather, mercy is to mark the entirety of the Christian life (liturgy, witness, and service), inasmuch as the entirety of the Church's life is vivified by the presence of the Spirit of Mercy. Christians are called, in imitation of Christ, not only to practice works of mercy now and then, but to live, breathe, and so communicate the Spirit of Mercy. Moreover, the works of mercy ought to honor the dignity of the recipient by inviting that person into relationship. As St. John Paul II elucidated in *Dives in misericordia*, mercy ought not be unilateral but reciprocal and mutual.<sup>44</sup> Thus, the Church's mission of mercy is complete only through the invitation of others to share in the Holy Spirit by entering into her communion of faith and love, and through that, into the communion of the Trinity. As the sacrament of mercy, the Church is to mirror the communion of the Trinity through the mutual love and relationship of its members.

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<sup>43</sup> Augustine, *The Confessions*, 1.1-2, 2.5, 5; Faustina Kowalska, *Divine Mercy in My Soul* (Stockbridge, Marian Press, 1984), no. 300.

<sup>44</sup> John Paul II, *Dives in misericordia*, no. 14.

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## CONCLUSION

While there is no discussion regarding mercy as an additional mark of the Church, it nonetheless serves as an appropriate foil in which to evaluate her mission in relation to mercy. For the Church is to remember the absolute priority of the person of the Spirit of Mercy over all the works of mercy. From Him flows all mercy, and His mercy is directed toward all people possessing and enjoying Him within their hearts. For through Him, each person's relationship is restored to God as Father and to others as brothers and sisters in Christ and His Church.

There is only one gift of mercy given to the Church: the Holy Spirit. The inner content of all works of mercy, of the entirety of the Christian life—as it was of the life of Christ—is the conveyance, the transmission, of this gift of the Holy Spirit to others. Without this inner content of mercy, mercy devolves into humanitarian aid that does not bring salvation, even if it assuages human misery. The goal of all the Church's life is to not only exteriorly alleviate suffering but to communicate this inner content of mercy, which is the person of the Holy Spirit, who enables us to live as sons of the Father like Christ and as brothers and sisters through love.

Divine Mercy is therefore not simply a part of Christian life, nor a part of divine revelation; rather, mercy is its source, essence, goal and summary. The Church is thoroughly marked by mercy, just as she is sealed by the Holy Spirit (cf. Eph 1:16); one cannot separate the Holy Spirit, the Church, and Divine Mercy. The Holy Spirit constitutes the Church as the People of God and His Temple, where Divine Mercy is visibly seen, experienced, and shared.

It is fitting to conclude with the words of Pope Francis on mercy: “The Church is commissioned to announce the mercy of God, the beating heart of the Gospel, which in its own way must penetrate the heart and mind of every person. The Spouse of Christ must pattern her behavior after the Son of God who went out to everyone without exception. In the present day, as the Church is charged with the task of the new evangelization, the theme of mercy needs to be proposed again and again with new enthusiasm and renewed pastoral action. It is absolutely essential for the Church and for the credibility of her message that she herself live and testify to mercy. Her language and her gestures must transmit mercy, so as to touch the hearts of all people and inspire them once more to find the road that leads to the Father. The Church's first truth is the love of Christ. The Church makes

herself a servant of this love and mediates it to all people... .”<sup>45</sup> This love the Church mediates in Christ is the gift of His merciful Spirit.

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<sup>45</sup> Francis, *Misericordiae vultus*, no. 12.



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### CZY PIĄTE ZNAMIĘ KOŚCIOŁA?

#### Streszczenie

Oprócz czterech znamion Kościoła, od pontyfikatu św. Jana Pawła II wskazuje się na miłosierdzie jako istotne znamię dla autentycznego wypełnienia się tożsamości i misji Kościoła. Chrystologiczne i pneumatologiczne rozumienie tych znamion prowadzi do właściwego zrozumienia Kościoła w odniesieniu do miłosierdzia. Kościół jest miłosierny nie *de facto* z powodu swoich dzieł miłosierdzia wobec ubogich lub grzeszników. Kościół jest raczej odbiorcą bezprecedensowego Bożego Miłosierdzia, wylanego w darze Ducha Świętego, i tym samym dzieli się Duchem Miłosierdzia z innymi poprzez swoje sakramenty, przepowiadanie i posługę. Misja miłosierdzia Kościoła wykracza zatem poza niezliczone sposoby łagodzenia ludzkiej nędzy. Kościół zjednoczony z Chrystusem, swoim Oblubieńcem, ma udzielać wszystkim jedyne go daru Bożego Miłosierdzia – Ducha Świętego.

**Słowa kluczowe:** miłosierdzie; Kościół; znamię; Duch Święty; misja.