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THE CONTEMPLATION OF GOD THE FATHER'S MERCY IN JESUS CHRIST

A b s t r a c t. Papal invitation to contemplate the face of the merciful God is a call for not contenting oneself with a superficial prayer or a prayer which detaches one from everyday matters. A special way of accepting the mercy of God takes place in the sacraments, e.g., in Baptism, in the Eucharist, in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. God wants to raise man at every moment of his life. Contemplation is acceptance of the mercy of God and at the same time it means drawing strength which is necessary for a man to become merciful. Engaging the whole human person in the act of contemplation allows the Holy Spirit to pour into it a desire to be merciful to others.

Key words: mercy; face; contemplation; prayer.

The *Misericordiae vultus* Bull, signed by Pope Francis on 11 April 2015, reminds contemporary people that the mystery of God's mercy is a fundamental truth for the economy of salvation. For this reason the Holy Father emphasizes in this document that the Church should always contemplate the mystery of mercy, in particular in these times, full of anxiety.¹

In view of this, in order to consciously respond to the papal invitation, it seems sensible to reflect on the mystery of God's endless love and make an attempt to answer the following questions:

1. What is the essence and the purpose of the contemplation of mercy?
2. What should be the main subject of the contemplation about God's mercy?

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¹ In italian: *contemplare il mistero della misericordia*; see FRANCIS, Bull *Misericordiae vultus*, 2 (from now on abbrev.: MV).

3. How should man get immersed in the contemplation of mercy, in order for it to bring the biggest fruit?

Before the attempt to reply these questions it is necessary to remind the meaning of the term “mercy”.

1. MERCY AS RELATIONSHIP

The term “mercy” was described, among others, in the John Paul II’s encyclical *Dives in Misericordia*, in the numbers 4–8.² Referring to the Old Testament, St. John Paul II emphasizes that God’s People of the Old Covenant obtained from their history, first and foremost, the experience of God’s mercy. This experience had social and communal character, as well as individual and internal one. In this experience God’s mercy is closely connected with the love of a special election, similar to the love of a bridegroom, forgiving unfaithfulness of his chosen bride. In the prophetic writings mercy also means the power of love, which is greater than sin and unfaithfulness. In the history of God’s Chosen People, mercy appears as liberation from disaster, for example—captivity. Therefore, it is possible to say in general that “mercy” in the Old Testament contains all shades of love: God is the Father (cf. Is 63:16), and the people are His firstborn son (cf. Ex 4,22). So, for Israel “mercy” has become the *content of communing with God*.³

Hebrew Old Testament uses two words to denote “mercy:” *hased* and *rahamim*. The first one (containing predominantly male features)—expresses the attitude of “goodness,” bound up with the faithfulness to oneself and the responsibility for *one’s love*, for internal obligation to approach the other person with kindness; and this is connected with forgiving and restoring one’s favour. The other expression (containing the features of female love)—means motherly love, freely given, unmerited; it points to closeness, contact and bond, to internal necessity, the compulsion of heart. The whole scale of feelings is related to it: goodness, affection, patience, the attitude of

² See JAN PAWEŁ II, Encyklika [Encyclical] *Dives in Misericordia*, in *Encykliki Ojca Świętego Jana Pawła II* [Encyclicals of the Holy Father John Paul II] (Kraków: Wyd. Znak, 1996), 77–139 (from now on abbrev.: DiM).

³ Cf. DiM, 4.

understanding, that is willingness to forgive.⁴ Generally speaking, the Old Testament reveals *a transcendental richness* of the truth of God's Mercy and encourages man to appeal to it (DiM 4).

"Mercy" also has its semantical richness in the New Testament. To denote compassionate love the following Greek expressions are used: *eleos, oiktirmos*—mercy; *eleao, eleo*—show mercy; *eleemon, eysplagchnos, hileos, oiktirmon*—merciful; *polysplagchnos*—very merciful; *hilaskomai*—to be merciful.⁵ Therefore St. John Paul II also shows the term "mercy" in the light of the New Testament (especially in relation to the parable of the prodigal son). New semantical content includes: restoring dignity, reclaiming humanity. The Pope teaches, in light of this, that it is not possible to speak of a relationship of inequality between the one who shows mercy and the one who receives it. The relationship of mercy is, and should be, a common experience of good inherent in the human being, common experience of this dignity. Therefore mercy appears to be the highlighting of good and bringing it to light from under all the layers of evil. The revelation of this mercy was accomplished in the event of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ (cf. DiM 5–7).

Now it is worth returning to the question: What is the essence and purpose of the contemplation of mercy? For this question is connected with doubts: Is not the contemplation of God's mercy a kind of "escape" in the face of a struggle with sin and life hardships that man is overwhelmed with? Or perhaps is it an attempt to justify oneself and an "encouragement" to resign from trying to amend one's attitude? Maybe it is a sort of "psychotherapy" and ridding oneself of the "sense of guilt?"

2. THE ESSENCE AND PURPOSE OF THE CONTEMPLATION OF MERCY

The essence of contemplation lies in the fact that objective reality of God becomes more and more real for man. Contemplation is an "act of silent attention," making everything that causes man to get trapped in subjectivism

⁴ Cf. DiM, 4, note 52.

⁵ See Remigiusz POPOWSKI, *Wielki słownik grecko-polski Nowego Testamentu* [The Great Greek-Polish Dictionary of the New Testament] (Warszawa: Wyd. "Vocatio", 1995), 730.

and everything that rouses anxiety stay outside while man is getting immersed in the fullness of God, in the life of the Holy Trinity.⁶ In the light of faith, contemplation is an experience of true reality, disregarding everything that keeps us on the surface of things. It is an experience of Divine life. The Holy Trinity wants to pass its life to man through contemplation, it wants to involve man's freedom, involve man in the mutual love.⁷

God the Father, whose love is the beginning of all, wants to give this life to the creation in immeasurable abundance. Endless fertility of God raises life, both in the biological, psychological and spiritual dimension. He eternally bears the Son and it is He who introduces people into participating in the life of His Son. Therefore human life is fulfilled as the participation in Christ's life. In the human person Christ is born in a mystical way. He should reach the fullness of growth in us, in order for everything to live in Him, to become His mystical Body. Contemplative gaze at God's mercy involves us in this act of bearing and in the breath of Holy Trinity, in the activity of Divine Persons. Contemplation enables man to probe into God's desires and to wish what the Creator wishes.⁸

Therefore another question arises: Can man initiate contemplation on his own, or is it only God who can lead man into it? So, is it an *active experience* (where man has an active role), or is it a *passive experience* (where man only "receives" mystical impartation of God). Analyzing the history of Catholic spirituality, it is noteworthy that the concept of "contemplation" is understood in both ways.

So, for instance, St. Ignatius Loyola perceives in it an active element; he describes how it should be performed; he divided it, for example, into preparatory prayer, three preludes, three points and one prayer (final).⁹ At the same time, in his *Spiritual exercises* he indicates that one should:

1. *recall* the content of what one wants to contemplate (no. 102);
2. *imagine* the contemplated places, *look* at them (no. 103);
3. *ask* God for the necessary prayer (no. 104—for the interior knowledge of the Lord, who for me has become man, that I may more love and follow Him);

⁶ Cf. Jean DANIÉLOU, *Trójca Święta i tajemnica egzystencji* [*The Holy Trinity and the mystery of existence*], trans. M. Tarnowska (Kraków, 1994), 45–46.

⁷ Cf. J. DANIÉLOU, *Trójca Święta* [*The Holy Trinity*], 49.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 49–50.

⁹ Cf. Św. IGNACY LOYOLA, *Ćwiczenia duchowne* [*Spiritual exercises*] (Kraków: Wyd. WAM, 1996) (see no. 101).

4. *see* the contemplated persons (no. 106);
5. *hear* what people say and what Divine Persons say (no. 107);
6. *reflect* what profit one can gain from the contemplation so far (no. 107);
7. *look* at what people are doing and what Divine Persons are doing (no. 108);
8. *have* a colloquy and think what to say to the Three Divine Persons and to Our Lady; *ask* according to what one feels internally (no. 109).

Contemplation so understood is an *active attitude* of man (with God's help he can *start the contemplation*); in it he involves his mind, will and heart—that is his whole person. In this way he is more and more open to the impartation of the life of the Spirit, who is a bond connecting the Father with the Son.¹⁰ Some contemporary theologians—such as M. Herráiz García—do not call the prayer so understood strictly a “contemplation,” but introduce another term, namely “contemplative prayer” (italian *orazione contemplativa*). They understand it as an “active prayer of attentiveness.”¹¹ In this way “contemplative prayer” is an intermediate (connective) form between the mental meditative prayer and the grace of mystical prayer, that is a passive one (more about it below).

In the Carmelitan school the word “contemplation” denotes a *passive experience*. It is a completely free gift from God, “an infused attentiveness” which leads to a “lucid contemplation”, a “perfect,” “pure,” “supernatural” one, to a true union with God.¹² St. Therese of Jesus describes this prayer in her work entitled *The Way of Perfection*. She writes that man—during the supernatural states of prayer—without the murmur of words hears and knows that inside him the Master is working. Then God suspends the powers of the soul (the reason and will) of man. At this time these powers enjoy the possession of God, but they do not understand how this happens. Man's soul is aflame with love, but it does not know how this happens that it loves more and more strongly. It experiences the bliss of encounter with God, but this is not a result of the reason's work. And the only knowledge man has at that time is that it is impossible to merit this good. This is precisely—in St. Therese's understanding—the perfect contemplation, a gift from Him, who is

¹⁰ Cf. J. DANIELOU, *Trójca Święta* [The Holy Trinity], 50.

¹¹ Cf. Maximiliano HERRÁIZ GARCÍA, “Preghiera contemplativa”, in *Enciclopedia della preghiera*, ed. C. Rossini and P. Sciadini (Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2007), 307.

¹² Cf. *ibid.*, 307.

the Lord of heaven and earth.¹³ John of the Cross understands contemplation in a similar way. He states that a “pure contemplation” consists in *receiving*,¹⁴ that is in *passive* acceptance.¹⁵

What is the difference between *active* and *passive* contemplation? In the so called active one, God imparts himself to man in a more natural way, while in the passive contemplation God changes the way of impartation to man to a supernatural one. It is then that the Holy Spirit makes people mystics and it is He who enables man to experience pure contemplation. According to St. Therese, the following signs in man’s spiritual life are the sign of such God’s activity:¹⁶

1. the impossibility to meditate in the way one has experienced mental prayer so far;

2. lack of comfort in God’s things and creations;

3. a burning desire to please God and love Him.

It is worth mentioning that even though St. Therese gives the name of contemplation to *passive* experience, she also mentions such *active* prayer which can today be called “contemplative prayer,” which leads to the already mentioned passive contemplation. In the *Book of Life*, in chapter 12, she writes that at the beginning of the way of internal prayer man to some extent can find pious feelings and spiritual comforts through his own work. The meditations on Christ’s passion, on all signs of love he gave us, on the resurrection lead to this. The joy these meditations raise in the soul is—according to St. Therese—neither purely spiritual, nor purely sensual. It is acquired partly through reason and partly it is an undeserved gift from God. According to the Saint, in mental prayer man can present himself in the presence of Christ, as if he saw Him with his own eyes, and learn to love Him more and more. He should concentrate more and more on Christ’s Humanity and always keep His company. He should talk to Him, ask in his needs, complain

¹³ Cf. Św. TERESA OD JEZUSA, *Droga doskonałości* [The Way of Perfection], chap. 25,2; see in Św. TERESA OD JEZUSA, *Dzieła* [The Works], vol. II (Kraków: Wyd. OO. Karmelitów Bosych, 1987³), 123.

¹⁴ Cf. Św. JAN OD KRZYŻA, *Żywy płomień miłości* [The Live Flame of Love], 3,36; see in Św. JAN OD KRZYŻA, *Dzieła* [The Works] (Kraków: Wyd. OO. Karmelitów Bosych, 1986⁴), 775–776.

¹⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, 3,34.

¹⁶ Cf. M. HERRÁIZ GARCÍA, “Preghiera contemplativa”, 308–309.

in sufferings, be joyful in comforts; he can speak to Him about everything he wants and he needs.¹⁷

Here we should come back to the main subject of analysis, that is God's mercy. In the light of what has been described above, no matter how contemplation is understood—either as *active* or *passive* experience—contemplating God's mercy is always a real encounter with the Trinity of Merciful Divine Persons. In the “contemplative prayer” (that is in contemplation understood *actively*) one is directed to the Merciful God and is focused, with the eyes of faith, on the Humanity of Christ. Thanks to the powers of the soul (reason and will), as well as thanks to memory, imagination and affections, man—as far as he is able and according to the grace given—can get to know God and get immersed in His mercy. In the *passive contemplation* of mercy man experiences—in a supernatural way—how God perfects the weak human nature and leads it towards deification.

In this context, it makes sense to reread the invitation of Pope Francis to contemplate mercy. It seems that the Holy Father encourages people to encounter the Merciful God, in an active and passive way (according to the imparted God's gifts), to experience His love and to learn in His presence to be merciful to others, according to Christ's words (see Matt 5:7, Lk 6:36). In this way man can experience, in the presence of God, the true happiness and discover his dignity and the dignity of the others. And precisely this is the purpose and sense of contemplating mercy.

Therefore Pope Francis emphasizes that the mystery of mercy is a condition for our salvation, a source of joy and peace. For mercy is a word which shows the truth about the Holy Trinity; it is a way connecting man with God; it is also a fundamental law, inscribed in the heart of each man. Mercy gives hope that each man is and will be loved, despite sins and all inclination to sin (see MV 2). The contemplation of God's mercy makes it possible for man in the middle of a world lacking in love, compassion and sympathy to begin to dwell in the Community of Merciful Persons and together with them show mercy to the others. In order to achieve this, to reveal in the “fullness of time” (cf. Gal 4:4) his ultimate love bending over the weak people, God send them his Son, born from Virgin Mary. Whoever wants to know the face of the Father, should look at His Son. And whoever sees the Son, also sees the Father (cf. Jn 14:9; MV1).

¹⁷ Cf. Św. TERESA OD JEZUSA, *Księga życia* [The Book of Life], chap. 12,1–2.

3. JESUS CHRIST—THE FACE OF MERCIFUL FATHER

In the first sentence of the Bull proclaiming the Year of Mercy (8 Dec 2015—20 Nov 2016) Holy Father Francis wrote: “Jesus Christ is the face of God’s Mercy” (MV 1). How should one understand this statement? In the biblical sense man’s “face” can be a synonym of the eyes (cf. Is 5:21) or the whole person (2Sam 17:11); it mirrors the emotional and spiritual state of the man (cf. Sir 13:25–26).¹⁸ It is a mirror of his heart. From the face it is possible to read pain (see Jer 30:6), tiredness (see Dan 1:10), distress (see Neh 2:2), joy (see Prov 15:13), severity (see Sir 7:24), firmness (see Deut 28:50). Looking at the countenance of an earthly ruler was a great honour (see Esth 1:14). In this context also the relationship with the Highest Ruler—God—was understood. Therefore—because of sin—man could not stand *face to face* with God (except for Moses; see Ex 33:11).¹⁹

Throughout the centuries man always encountered the question: what is the true God like? The words of the Psalmist express this longing: “Lord, I seek your face” (Ps 27[26]:8). Revealing the truth about who God is reached its climax in Jesus Christ. God’s omnipotence was most clearly revealed in mercy, where goodness overcomes punishment. All the earthly life of Christ showed the face of Father’s mercy. In Jesus’ gestures, in His words and signs, in the whole Paschal event, the truth about God’s love is inscribed, love bending over humanity and restoring it from the fall of sin. Looking at Christ’s face, man *can experience* the love of Holy Trinity (cf. MV 1,8). Christ, who is God and man, shows God’s face as well as the true face of man.²⁰ God’s glory shines on Christ’s face (cf. 2Cor 3:18; 4:6; Matt 17:2; Lk 9:29).²¹

In this context it is worth analyzing what—in the biblical sense—it means to see the face of God. *God’s turning back his face* was a harbinger of punishments (see Is 54:8; 59:2; 64:6). So the fact that God *shows his face* in

¹⁸ Krzysztof MIELCAREK, “Oblicze. 1. W Biblii” [“Face. 1. In the Bible”], in *Encyklopedia Katolicka* [Catholic Encyclopedia], vol. 14, 190.

¹⁹ Félix GILS and Jacques GUILLET, “Oblicze” [“Face”], in *Słownik Teologii Biblijnej* [Dictionary of Biblical Theology], ed. X. LÉON-DUFOUR (Poznań: Wyd. Pallotinum, 1990), 584–585.

²⁰ Cf. JAN PAWEŁ II, List apostolski [The Apostolic Letter] *Novo millennio ineunte* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo TUM, 2001), no. 23 (from now on abbrev.: NMI).

²¹ F. GILS and J. GUILLET, “Oblicze” [“Face”], 585.

Christ means that God does not want to punish his people any longer, but bend over them with love. "To see the face of God" in the Old Testament means to "visit the temple" (see Deut 16:16) and "seek the face of God" means "seek God's will" (see 2Sam 21:1).²² So, *contemplating in Christ the face of Father's mercy* (cf. MV 1) means entering the space of *sacrum*, the reality of heaven and being united with God's love expressed in Christ—according to Father's words: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, hear Him" (Matt 17:5).

The contemplation of Christ's face should draw inspiration from the Bible, which is, as a whole, saturated with the mystery of God's Son. Pondering over the New Testament, the believer opens oneself to the activity of Holy Spirit and gets to know the testimony of apostles—direct witnesses of the Saviour's life. The people who edited the Gospels in the light of the Holy Ghost passed down to the next generations the content of the earliest testimonies about Jesus' life: about His virgin birth from Mary, about His *hidden life* for thirty years in Nazareth, about his public activity, about the conflict with religious groups of His age, about the Golgotha and the Resurrection.²³ Christ's face is human. And although it was insulted (cf. Mk 14:65), it is *the reflection of God's essence* (cf. Hebr 1:3).²⁴

When somebody contemplates particular facts from Jesus' life, he or she notices that everything in Him speaks about mercy—about compassionate love for: sinners, demoniacs, the enslaved, poor, rejected, suffering and sick (cf. MV 8). Christ shows that God does not write anybody off, He gives a chance to change one's life, He searches for a lost man, He forgives, gives a calling to the converted one and chooses him as his disciple (eg. Matthew, the publican; see Matt 9:9–13; cf. MV 8). Jesus draws exactly such an image of God in his parables, for example: about the lost sheep (Lk 15:1–7), about the prodigal son (Lk 15:11–32), about a merciless debtor (Matt 18:23–35; cf. MV 9). To those who did not understand His behaviours, for instance, why He eats together with publicans and sinners, Jesus explained that he had not come to call the just, but sinners (cf. Matt 9:12). Referring to the words of prophet Hosea (Hos 6:6), he recommended to everybody who was surprised that they meditate over the words: "I want mercy rather than sacrifice" (Matt 9:13; see MV 20). Before His death—while setting up the Eucharist—Jesus

²² Cf. K. MIELCAREK, "Oblicze. 1. W Biblii" ["Face. 1. In the Bible"], 190.

²³ See NMI, 17–18.

²⁴ F. GILS and J. GUILLET, "Oblicze" ["Face"], 585.

was praying with the Psalm of mercy (see Matt: 26:30; Ps 136[135]). Then he fulfilled the mystery of God's merciful love, going through the passion and the cross.²⁵ In this way—in the hour of the cross—before humanity the *most paradoxical aspect of the mystery of Jesus* was uncovered. As St. John Paul II teaches—this truth can only be adored by man on his knees. Jesus Christ, to show the face of God to man, did not only have to accept human face, but also the “face” of sin.²⁶

While contemplating the earthly life of Jesus, man perceives the mystery of His self-renunciation, “stripping” Himself from the glory of the Son of God that he possesses (cf. Phil 2:6–8; 1P 3:18). Christ takes this attitude in order to be close to man. He accepts *all dimensions of humanity* apart from sin (cf. Heb 4:15). But the self-renunciation of the Son of God is not the aim in itself. It leads to the exaltation of Christ (in His Resurrection and Ascension), and together with Him, of everybody who gives their life to Him (see Phil 2:9–11). This is because Christ is a “new man” (cf. Eph 4:24), who gives to the humanity redeemed on the cross the possibility to participate in the life of Divine Persons. Through the power of the Holy Spirit man can be “deified” and become similar to God. Thanks to the fact that the Son of God has become man, man can become an adopted child of God.²⁷ The infinity, to which every man is invited, becomes a sign of the endless mercy of God. So, in Jesus Christ man can perceive:²⁸

1. the face of the Son;
2. the suffering face;
3. the face of the Resurrected One—the glorious face.

Contemplating God's face in these three dimensions helps man to discover in Jesus Christ the affectionate love of the Father, and in it—his identity of an adopted son of God; of someone who is very dear to the Father, for whom he allowed the blood of his Son to be shed (1P 1:18–19). Simultaneously, man discovers that he is invited to the joy of living in the resurrection (Jn 5:29).

God shows mercy to man, but at the same time He calls upon him to do likewise to those whom he meets on the way of his life. For Jesus does not only forgive himself, but also teaches people to forgive each other (Matt

²⁵ Cf. MV, 7.

²⁶ See NMI, 25.

²⁷ Cf. NMI, 22–23.

²⁸ See NMI, 24–28.

18:22; cf. MV 9). The issue at stake is to renounce all forms of grudge and hatred leading to violence (cf. MV 15). Therefore Pope Francis reminds that because man should become merciful, he has first to listen well to the God's word addressed to him, to meditate it in silence. And this leads to the contemplation of God's mercy, to experiencing God's mercy and to accepting mercy as one's own style of life (see MV 13; cf. NMI 39). Also John Paul II encourages the Church to gaze at, to contemplate the countenance of the Lord (NMI 16), who leads to the knowledge of Father's face. Mary is the model and aid in contemplating Jesus; she preserved in her heart God's mercy and proclaimed it to the others (see Lk 1:50). Under the cross She was a witness of the words of forgiveness uttered by Jesus; She enables the believers to contemplate in the appropriate way the face of mercy—the face of Her Son Jesus (see MV 24).

4. MERCY AS THE FRUIT OF CONTEMPLATION AND STYLE OF LIFE

Spiritual experiences of a Christian related to the contemplation of the *merciful face of God in Christ* are based on the belief that we get to know God through the humanity of Jesus Christ. The cult of the face of God, the cult of the face of Christ is at the same time a cult of the person of Christ and also veneration of the Persons of the Holy Trinity: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. A perfect contemplation of the Face of God is possible only in the blissful vision (lat. *visio beatifica*) in heaven; but in the earthly domain the contemplation of the face of Christ suffering and glorified is its forecast—its anticipation.²⁹ Through Holy Spirit, through theological virtues (faith, hope and love), a Christian can already on the earth get to know to some extent the glory of God's face; illuminated with this glory he joins those for whom the words of St. Paul matter: “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2Cor

²⁹ Cf. Jerzy MISIUREK, “Oblicze. 2. W duchowości” [“Face. 2. In the Spirituality”], in *Encyklopedia Katolicka* [Catholic Encyclopedia], vol. 14, 190–192.

3:18).³⁰ Contemplative prayer directed at God's mercy makes it possible to understand that it is Christ who saves and the faith in Him that does so, not only observing the Law. It is the Son of God, through His passion, death and resurrection, who gives to man the possibility of salvation, when man entrusts himself to God's mercy and in this way allows God to justify him, which means accepting from God the forgiveness and new life (cf. MV 20). So, compunction, conversion and faith should be the fruit of mercy (cf. MV 21).

The contemplation of mercy also leads to the discovery of the great *dignity* that man received from God; it shapes the identity of a daughter or son of God—adopted in Christ; this contemplation also urges to take the attitude of mercy towards others. So mercy becomes a criterion for recognizing if man has actually become the disciple of Christ (see MV 9). The attitude of mercy becomes the ideal of life (see Matt 5:7; Lk 6:36; cf. MV 9). According to Pope Francis the elements of this attitude are as follows: do not judge the other person in words, do not condemn them, forgive and have an attitude of kindness towards everybody. What matters is to offer—like God—one's life to the others, freely (cf. Lk 6:37–38; MV 14). The shepherds of the Church should take care to have the attitude of hospitability and mercy for the poor and for all who need consolation and aid—for this is what they promise during the act of ordination.³¹

It might seem that man who experiences in a supernatural way the closeness of God, possesses Him for ever and does not feel the contrition for sins committed beforehand. But such thinking is erroneous. St. Therese of Jesus points this out, emphasizing that the more grace man receives from God, the stronger the internal pain in him is growing because of the committed sins. And even though the confessed sins have been absolved, the pain resulting from the consciousness of the evil done previously will stay with man until his death. Man does not so much think about the punishments (the effects of sin) that he exposed himself to, but he bemoans his ingratitude towards the endless love of God.³² So the contemplation of mercy is not an escape from the consciousness of evil, but—actually thanks to this consciousness—it is a more and more profound comprehension of the endless goodness of God who liberated man from this evil. So, it can be stated that along with the

³⁰ F. GILS and J. GUILLET, "Oblicze" ["Face"], 585.

³¹ BENEDYKT XVI, Encyklika [Encyclical] *Deus caritas est* (Poznań: Wyd. Księgarnia Świętego Wojciecha, 2006), no. 32.

³² Cf. Św. TERESA OD JEZUSA, *Twierdza wewnętrzna* [The Interior Castle], VI,7,1–2; see in Św. TERESA OD JEZUSA, *Dziela* [The Works], vol. II, 373.

development of contemplation the awareness of one's own sinfulness grows, as well as the awareness of the social effects of each committed sin. The more man approaches God in contemplation, the more he knows his weakness to sinning—both in the individual and the social dimension.³³ The contemplation of mercy helps man not to fall into discouragement or despair but cling to God in a stronger way.

So, the desire to celebrate God's mercy flows from contemplative prayer, especially in the Sacrament of Reconciliation (cf. MV 17), where God heals man's soul from sins. Opening oneself to the *grace of indulgence* is also the fruit of this prayer. It means the healing of all negative traces of sins (previously absolved in the sacrament), that is wounds which were inflicted and often stay too long in our thoughts, influencing our behaviour. This healing helps the sinner to stop reliving the sin, but instead—to grow in love (see MV 22).

By contemplating the face of merciful God in the person of Jesus, the Church becomes aware that liturgy (including sacraments) is a special place of Christ's activity. At every moment of the *liturgical activity* Jesus offers himself to the Father for us, he expresses love towards us, he completes the mystery of salvation and fulfils the Father's intention for us. There is a two-way relationship between liturgy and contemplation: thanks to the contemplation man discovers liturgy and liturgy leads to contemplation. It can even be said that contemplation is the aim of liturgy, understood as history which *is in development*. Also the *Liturgy of the Hours* should be understood in this way, as it is based on the theology of prayer of Christ Himself.³⁴

The Church today has her eyes fixed on the resurrected face of the divine Bridegroom and perceives in Him her treasure and true joy. From this she gains the strength to continue on her way, to make disciples of all the nations (see Matt 28:19–20). The new God's People has the duty to reveal the truth—to what great spiritual depth the prayerful relationship with Him leads. All communities should become “schools” of prayer, in order for man not to be content with just imploring Jesus, but also be open to: thanksgiving, praise, adoration, listening, contemplation (cf. NMI 28,33). It is important that the contemplation of mercy be connected with various traditional forms of prayer, such as the examination of conscience, Rosary or the Way of the

³³ Cf. Saturnino GAMARRA, *Teología Espiritual*, ed. Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos (BAC) (Madrid, 2004), 243.

³⁴ Cf. Domenico SORRENTINO, *L'esperienza di Dio. Disegno di teologia spirituale*, ed. Citadella Editrice (Asisi, 2007), 785–789.

Cross (Calvary prayer books);³⁵ this will allow to realize that the act of receiving mercy from God is an invitation to respond with one's whole life to this gift, in various ways.

Contemplating God's mercy, man discovers that God takes *responsibility* for us; simultaneously, from God he learns this responsibility for himself and the others (see MV 9). This makes it possible not to fall into indifference, cynicism, or becoming accustomed to the present situation in relation to people who suffer either material or moral poverty (cf. MV 15). This prayer urges man to perform the *acts of mercy, both corporal and spiritual* (see MV 15). The attitude of commitment to open fight against corruption should be another fruit of contemplating mercy. Pope Francis stresses that whoever does not do so, becomes an accomplice of corruption and destroys his very existence (see MV 19).

Mercy among people "originates from inter-ecclesial communion" (NMI 49). If man truly contemplates the face of God in Christ, he will begin to notice Him in the other people, since Christ identifies himself with the smallest ones (cf. Matt 25:35–36). Therefore it is important that everybody who needs mercy should feel "at home" in Church communities (cf. NMI 50).

5. TOWARDS EVANGELIZATION VIA MERCY—CONCLUSIONS

As it has been stated, contemplation in the classic sense is a passive experience. It is connected with experiencing a purgation performed by the Holy Spirit. In the Carmelite tradition this state is called a "dark night", which encompasses two seemingly contradictory experiences: of suffering and love. On one hand man does not feel the presence of God, which causes great pain. On the other—the desire to love God grows in man. In the light of the reflection on Christ's life who shows the merciful face of the Father, it must be emphasized that Jesus himself experienced such "dark night" during His passion. For him it was happiness to radically do the Father's will, although

³⁵ See Marek CHMIELEWSKI and Janusz KRÓLIKOWSKI, *Duchowość uczynków miłosierdzia. Materiały duszpasterskie na Jubileuszowy Rok Miłosierdzia (8 XII 2015–20 XI 2016)* [The Spirituality of the acts of mercy. Materials for the Jubilee of Mercy (8 XII 2015–20 XI 2016)] (Lublin–Skarżysko-Kamienna: Wyd. "Polihymnia", 2015), 193; cf. Jerzy MISIUREK, "Oblicze. 2. W duchowości" ["Face. 2. In the Spirituality"], 191.

as man and God he experienced an immeasurable suffering, both in the physical and spiritual dimension. This paradoxical mystical connection between suffering and happiness is for the contemplatives and those who adore the mystery of Christ the fundament of hope that through such experience Holy Spirit wants man who proceeds in faith to become similar to the Son of God the Father (cf. Ro 8:29). It should be added that according to one of Carmelite mystics, Bl. Elisabeth of the Trinity (1880–1906) pure faith already means looking at God not through a veil, but meeting Him *face to face*, yet in darkness; at the moment of death the light will be ignited for ever.³⁶ Man will then enjoy a direct vision. So, faith should be understood as waiting for proper comprehension; the comprehension is true, but still imperfect.³⁷

Saint Paul, the Apostle of the Nations, taught that those who received mercy can proclaim it; and the experience of mercy leads to faithfulness. He himself was aware that he obtained mercy “that in him first Jesus Christ might show all His magnanimity” (1Tim 1:12–16). Therefore St. Paul many times prays for mercy for others (see Gal 6:16; 1Tim 1:2; 2Tim 1:2; Tit 1:4).³⁸ A conscious adoption of this attitude of love, raising the others from the fall, is a confirmation of credibility of the Church and of Christian life (cf. NMI 35–37; MV 10). A Christian person lives authentic life only when he or she professes and proclaims mercy (cf. DiM 13). Throughout the ages it is the task of the Church to make the splendour of Christ’s face visible—also in the Third Millennium (NMI 10). Today it is necessary to contemplate mercy so as to be involved, in the present difficult times, with a new zeal and enthusiasm in new evangelization, in introducing people into the experience of selfless merciful love of the Creator, into the life of the Holy Trinity, from which a “a great river of mercy flows” (MV 25). Evangelization should be performed not only by *proclaiming* the gospel message, but also through the *ministry of mercy*. Otherwise—as St. John Paul II

³⁶ Cf. 1Cor 13:12–13; see ÉLISABETH DE LA TRINITÉ, *Œuvres complètes*, Édition critique réalisée par le Père Conrad De Meester, carme. Préface du cardinal Albert Decourtray archevêque de Lyon, Paris 1996² (about seeing God *face to face* in the darkness – see: L 165, 193; about the change of this reality into seeing God *face to face in the light* – in heaven – see L 177).

³⁷ Jean-Hervé NICOLAS, *Sintesi Dogmatica. Dalla Trinità alla Trinità*, vol. 1 (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1991), 269.

³⁸ Cf. L. MORRIS, “Miłosierdzie” [“Mercy”], in *Słownik teologii św. Pawła* [Dictionary of Paul and his Letters], ed. G.F. Hawthorne and R.P. Martin and D.G. Ried (Warszawa: Wyd. “Vocatio”, 2010), 476–477.

warned—it will drown in the flood of words (NMI 50). Evangelization is all about helping man encounter God who loves him.

Translated by Maciej Górnicki

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KONTEMPLACJA MIŁOSIERDZIA BOGA OJCA W JEZUSIE CHRYSZTUSIE

S t r e s z c z e n i e

Papieskie zaproszenie do kontemplowania oblicza miłosiernego Boga jest wezwaniem do tego, by nie zadowalać się modlitwą powierzchowną bądź taką, która odrywa od spraw życia codziennego. Szczególny sposób przyjmowania miłosierdzia Boga dokonuje się w sakramentach, np. w Chrście Świętym, w Eucharystii, w Sakramencie Pojednania. Bóg pragnie podnosić człowieka w każdej chwili jego życia. Kontemplacja jest przyjmowaniem miłosierdzia Boga i jednocześnie czerpaniem siły, by stać się człowiekiem miłosiernym. Angażowanie w kontemplacji całej osoby ludzkiej pozwala Duchowi Świętemu wlać w nią pragnienia bycia miłosiernym dla innych.

Słowa kluczowe: miłosierdzie; oblicze; kontemplacja; modlitwa.