

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

Today as I am thinking of you, I am also thinking of *love, mercy and sacrifice*.

As I write this, it is the first Sunday of Lent and Valentine's Day. We are also two months into the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy. By the time you read it, we will be much closer to Easter. The beautiful cycle of God's love for us in the Incarnation, Crucifixion and Resurrection goes on. How do we respond?



Each day we encounter many opportunities for *love, mercy and sacrifice*. My letter to you in January listed the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy. As Franciscans, our spiritual lives and the love we have for God are rooted in the image of Jesus that we see in our brothers and sisters and in all of creation. We are *always* called to reach out to others, to step *outside* of ourselves. This does not only happen when we help strangers. It also occurs when we are kind, patient and forgiving toward those whom we call our family, be they our natural family members or our brothers and sisters in fraternity.

We gain inspiration in this from our Seraphic Father who added an additional verse to his Canticum of the Creatures as he helped to bring peace between the Commune of Assisi and Bishop Guido II in 1225: "Overcome by the climate of hate that was created in his own town because of this confrontation, Francis endeavored to put an end to it. To that end, he added an important verse to the Canticum of Brother Sun (or the Canticum of the Creatures), which he had composed a little bit earlier:

'Praise be to you, my Lord, For those who pardon for love of you, And support illnesses and tribulations: Happy those who will endure these in peace, For by you, Most High, they will be crowned.'" (Vauchez, André (2012-10-23). Francis of Assisi (p. 68). Yale University Press. Kindle Edition.)

"In ***Misericordiae Vultus*** (the papal bull proclaiming the Jubilee Year of Mercy), Pope Francis writes:

'With our eyes fixed on Jesus and his merciful gaze, we experience the love of the Most Holy Trinity. The mission Jesus received from the Father is none other than revealing the very love that gives itself to every person without excluding anyone: 'Everything in him speaks of mercy. Nothing in him is devoid of compassion.'" (Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization (2015-10-12). The Parables of Mercy: Pastoral Resources for Living the Jubilee (Jubilee Year of Mercy) (p. 7). Our Sunday Visitor. Kindle Edition.)

I pray that our focus during Lent, and always, may be on ACTING UPON *love, mercy and sacrifice*. Let us reach out to others. The mercy and forgiveness we show, the service we give, should be a sacrifice of the HEART. Don't wait to forgive one another. Jesus did not ask us to make the first move before he became one of us and died for us. It is *precisely* because he died for us *before* we ever had the chance to ask for forgiveness that draws us to him in daily conversion. I pray that we

don't wait to be asked to serve the poor and the suffering. May we do acts of mercy because we have been *given* so much mercy. I pray that we will always be grateful for the gifts we have been given, that we will try not to complain and that we will hand any bitterness we may feel over to God. In this way we can open our hearts to the love that is always ours because he gives it to us freely.

We also find concrete opportunities for giving and receiving mercy all around us. This year, for example, at *Convivenza* (our Chapter of Mats), on *Saturday, April 23rd*, we hope to inspire you by offering a "*Day of Pilgrimage*." By now your Ministers should have received and shared two communications announcing *Convivenza*. We will gather at Sacred Heart Church in Wallington, NJ, which is a designated pilgrimage site in the Archdiocese of Newark. We will have speakers, prayer, Mass and the chance to pass through the Holy Doors together to gain the indulgence as a family. As always, there will be time for discussion, sharing and fraternity.

We will also offer *two concrete opportunities* to do works of mercy. I have described in detail both possibilities in my letter inviting everyone to *Convivenza*. (That letter is also available on our website and has been sent to the general membership via email.) These two opportunities are a "Baby Shower for Birthright and Several Sources" and "Blessed Bloomers," a Mychal's message project. Please look at the lists of items needed and bring them with you on April 23rd. You can choose one cause or contribute to both. Please make whatever sacrifice you can.

We want you to know that your Region Council always keeps you in prayer, and we ask you to pray for us as we continue to serve you and our Region. We have been hard at work planning other interesting opportunities for you to grow in your Franciscan vocation and spirituality and as present or future servant leaders. We hope that you will join us!

We are looking forward to seeing many of you at *Convivenza* and when we visit your fraternities for elections and visitations. Be assured that we are always willing to help you in any way that we can, so please don't hesitate to call or email any one of us.

Peace and blessings,



Diane F. Menditto, OFS
Minister, Our Lady of the Angels Region