



The Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's Gospel is found after the passages referring to the start of Jesus' public life. The mountain is seen as a symbol of a new Mount Sinai on which Christ, the new Moses, offers his 'law'. The previous chapter speaks of great crowds who began to follow Jesus and to whom he addressed his teachings. These words, however, are spoken by Jesus to the disciples and to the newly formed community who would later be called Christians. He introduces the 'kingdom of heaven' that lies at the very heart of his preaching. The Beatitudes are its manifesto, the message of salvation and the 'synthesis of all the Good News that is the revelation of God's saving love.'

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy

What is mercy? Who are the merciful? The sentence is introduced by the word 'blessed', which means *happy* or *fortunate* and also takes on the meaning of *being blest by God*. In the text, this phrase takes a central place among the nine Beatitudes which do not refer to behaviour that will be rewarded but rather are real opportunities to become a little more like God. The merciful, in particular, are those whose hearts are filled with love for Him and for their brothers and sisters. This concrete love leans towards the least, the forgotten, the poor and those in need of selfless love. *Mercy*, in fact, is one of God's attributes; Jesus himself is mercy.

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The Beatitudes transform and revolutionise the way we think. They are not just words of consolation but have the power to change our hearts, they have the power to create a new humanity and make the proclamation of the Word effective. We should live the beatitude of mercy with ourselves too and recognise that we are in need of that extraordinary, superabundant and immense love that God has for each of us.

The word *mercy* comes from the Hebrew *rehem*, 'womb' evoking a sense of limitless divine mercy, like the compassion that a mother feels for her child. It is 'a love that does not measure, abundant, universal and concrete... A love that tends to draw out a response of love from others which is the ultimate goal of mercy. ... And so, if we have suffered due to any offence or any injustice, let us forgive and be forgiven. We can be the first to be merciful and compassionate! Even if this seems difficult and challenging, let us ask ourselves, in front of each neighbour, how this person's mother would behave towards him or her? It is a thought that helps us to understand and live according to the heart of God,' as Chiara Lubich writes.

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'After two years of marriage, our daughter and her husband decided to separate. We welcomed her back into our home and during the moments of tension that followed, we tried to love her by being patient, forgiving and having an attitude of understanding in our hearts. We maintained an open relationship with her and her husband, above all by trying not to be judgmental. After three months of listening, discreet help and many prayers, they were reunited and there is a different sense of awareness, trust and hope in their relationship now.'

Being merciful is more than forgiving. It means having a big heart that can't wait to wipe the slate clean, to melt away everything that may be an obstacle in our relationships with others. Jesus' invitation to be merciful, offers us a means of returning to the original design of God and become what we were created to be: human beings made in his image and likeness.

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