

Dear People Whom God Loves,

## **CHURCH OF MERCY**

That is the title of a book by Pope Francis. It is also the subject of much of the rumbling going on in our church today. For a long time mercy as an attribute of God took a very small place in our theological understanding of what God is like. In fact, at times it seemed to disappear. Since God was seen as a perfect being and feeling mercy and being influenced by that feeling was an imperfection, God could not be moved to compassion by the suffering of creatures. Hence, mercy took a back seat. An example from sin. God would have mercy only after a human repented for sinning.

Thinking of God as a king and lawgiver who rewards obedience and punishes disobedience also made it hard to see God as mercy.

Cardinal Walter Kasper has recently written a book entitled Mercy. (I have only read a few pages at this time.) He will be making the case that "Mercy must be understood as God's own justice and his holiness." pg. 13

On the cover is a quote from Pope Francis: "This book has done me so much good."

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In the Star Tribune newspaper (October 18, 2014) the following was written: "Francis gesture, and his words inside the synod hall chastising bishops who were overly wed to doctrine and were guided by 'hostile rigidity' as well as those bishops who showed a 'destructive goody-goodness'."

My personal understanding of Pope Francis' words is this. The Synod was discussing the church's teaching about homosexual people, gay marriage, civil marriage, living together without being married and the receiving of communion by divorced and remarried people who have not received an annulment.

Pope Francis was saying (in my understanding) that some bishops were angrily unwilling to even consider the possibility of any changes. Other bishops were in favor of the importance of mercy but still were not willing to be involved in the difficult work of deciding what traditions need to be changed and what (I would say deeper) traditions need to be kept. I also think Francis was addressing the temptation for people who to the primacy of mercy but still do not do anything to change the way they live and act nor do anything to release suffering and pain.

I foresee this as a difficult process. I am also filled with hope because I see the spirit of God working and because mercy and compassion are so God-like. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus testify to this.

As we who claim to follow Jesus, allow that love and mercy of God to enter into us and affect and effect the way we think and live, people will be drawn into love and mercy because it is good and beautiful. The love and mercy of God is then spreading. From my perspective, evangelization is about spreading love and mercy and not about increasing church membership. If that increase happens, it happens. But that should not be our goal.

Smile, God Loves You,  
Father Clay