

## **Jesus' Acts of Mercy in the Old & New Testament**

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Hi, I'm Katie Sciba. Thanks for being here for our second session of The Pray More Advent Retreat. Let's pray.

### **Opening Prayer**

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Jesus, You are love and mercy itself. Give us the grace as necessary to hear You speaking in our lives. Soften our hearts to receive Your mercy so we can experience the joy and freedom You desire for us. We ask this through Your holy name. Amen.

### **What Mercy Really Is**

Our last session, we talked about mercy, what it really is. And in short, it is when we who are capable act for someone who is incapable in a loving way, and that's when you're exercising mercy. The Lord himself spoke to St. Faustina saying, "I am love and mercy itself." And so, in order to experience the mercy of God, part of that is examining what that is. We talked about what it looks like in the Old Testament, how in the Protoevangelium in Genesis 3:15 that was the first time we were promised savior to restore the broken relationship between humanity and God. And then when God came to Moses through the burning bush and said that He had heard the cry and knew the suffering of His people in Egypt, and so He was coming to rescue them. These are powerful examples of mercy in the Old Testament. And this carried on throughout the New, right? So first we have the story of the Nativity itself.

### **The Story of the Nativity**

*This is from Luke chapter 2. "In those days, a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled. This was the first enrollment when Quirinius was governor of Syria and all went to be enrolled each to his own city. And Joseph also went out from Galilee from the city of Nazareth to Judea to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to be delivered, and she gave birth to her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger because there was no place for them in the inn."*

Our Lord, He who is all powerful, all capable, all loving, His act of mercy in this instance was coming to humanity in the most vulnerable of ways. If you've ever encountered a newborn, you know how helpless they are. They can't even lift their own heads. They can't even control their own muscle movements. And this is how the Lord came to us. A vulnerable newborn who relied on others to act for Him.

## **The Gospel of Mark**

Another one of my favorite acts of mercy is the healing of the paralytic, and this is from the Gospel of Mark. *"And when He returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that He was at home, and many were gathered together, so there was no longer room for them, not even about the door. And He was preaching the Word to them. And they came, bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men. And when they could not get near Him because of the crowd, they were moved to the roof above Him. And when they had made an opening, they let down the pallet on which the paralytic lay.*

*And when Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, 'Child, your sins are forgiven.' Now, some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, 'Why does this man speak like this? It is blasphemy. Who can forgive sins but God alone?' And immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they questioned like this within themselves, said to them, 'Why do you question like this in your hearts? Which is easier? To say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven?' Or to say, 'Rise, take up your pallet and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.' He said to the paralytic, 'I say to you, rise, take up your pallet, and go home.' The man rose and immediately took up the pallet and went out before them all. So they were all amazed and glorified God."*

The man rose and took up his pallet. He was paralyzed, incapable of any kind of action on his own. He could not get to Jesus, but he had friends who enabled that to happen. Even punching a hole through a ceiling in order that he could get to the Savior and receive healing.

## **Full of the Mercy of God**

One of my favorite things to consider in this reading is asking myself: What paralyzes my own soul? What is it that freezes me? And who are the people in my life carrying my mat, so to speak? Who are the people who support me and who encourage me to Jesus so I can receive healing? The New Testament is full of the mercy of God. It is full.

So, we have even situations like when the Lord was at the wedding feast at Cana, and they ran out of wine and He took water and made it into wine. Anytime He explained parables to those who didn't understand them, that was an act of mercy, because people were incapable of understanding, and so He made what He was saying more accessible.

Another favorite of mine is the story of Zacchaeus, right? So, we have this short guy, and he wanted to see Jesus. He was a tax collector, and so hated in society. Probably not a very happy guy. So short, and he climbed a tree to see Jesus, just to get a look at Him. And the Lord, an act of mercy then was just walking right up to him. "You want to see? Here I am." It was an act of mercy, both when Jesus approached Zacchaeus, but also something that blows my mind is considering that it was also an act of mercy when the Lord planted that tree decades before, knowing how it would be used.

## **God Wants to Help You**

The thing with the mercy of God is that so many of us look at the Old Testament, we look at the New Testament, we know what the mercy of God is, but we don't necessarily know how to identify it present in our lives now. So, one of my favorite saints is St. Therese, the Little Flower. A lot of people, they've read the "Story of a Soul." They love her. So many Catholics love her. And she felt so helpless when it came to sainthood. And she said, "I want, in a word, to be a saint. But I feel my helplessness, oh God. So, I beg you to be Yourself my sanctity."

She wanted to be holy. She wanted to have intimacy with Jesus. She wanted to be a saint, but she felt that impossibility within herself. And that has happened to me so many times where I know what I'm shooting for. I want to be in heaven. But honestly, it feels like an impossible task. It feels so hard and, like, it just will not happen. But here is the deal: That prayer from St. Therese asking God to be holiness for her is a very real thing that we can share in. God wants to help you where you cannot do for yourself. He wants to be your sanctity, your holiness. He wants to help where you cannot help yourself.

So sometimes in order to concretize this a little bit better, I think of my children. My children, I have six. None of them were born with discipline. None of them came out disciplined, right? None of them knew how much food exactly to eat, when to take a nap. None of them knew how to do that. And so, I had to show them how much, when to take a nap. I had to be discipline on their behalf until they could understand how to do these things for themselves. And in a similar way, the Lord can be holiness for us. He can be our own sanctity.

But we have hang-ups, right? So we have personal pain that holds us back from holiness. We have habitual sins that hold us back from holiness. And the Lord is willing to help us overcome these things. They do not have to stand in the way.

## **Communicate with God**

One of the wisest pieces of advice I ever received was from my bishop, who is a close friend of my family's in Louisiana. And at one point I told my bishop, I said, "You know, my prayer life just isn't that great. I'm pretty angry with God." And my bishop was unfazed, and he said, "Well, did you tell him?" And I said, "No." And he said, "Well, you should just let him have it. He's big enough." And I realized that even in my hardness of heart, I could still approach God, that God still wanted my hardened heart. And I could give him my very meager offering in saying, "Okay, do with this what You will." Because we know from scripture that he heals the broken-hearted and binds up their wounds.

## **What Way are you Deaf to the Lord?**

Last example of the mercy of God in the New Testament is when the people in the Gospel of Mark, the people brought to Jesus a deaf man who had always been deaf, and the Lord healed him. What way are you deaf to the Lord? Where do you need to be healed so you can hear Him and receive Him better with more humility, with more joy? It's these things that we want to take to prayer and ask the Lord to reveal how we are paralyzed, how we are deaf to Him. We can ask

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Him to reveal those who will help us and encourage us to intimacy with Him. And even when we have such hardened hearts, we could be confident that Jesus wants that as well. Let's pray.

### **Closing Prayer**

Lord, You are master over all of our pain, all of our circumstances. We beg You to hear us, to give us Your mercy, and to be confident in it so we can entrust ourselves to You and know the joy of your Nativity. We ask this in your name. Amen.