



JUSTICE, PEACE AND INTEGRITY OF CREATION



THE FRANCISCAN FACE OF MERCY

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In **Misericordiae Vultus**, the Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, Pope Francis writes: *Jesus of Nazareth is the face of the Father's mercy. By his words, his actions, and his entire person, Jesus reveals the mercy of God. He goes on to write: We need constantly to contemplate the mystery of mercy. It is a wellspring of joy, serenity, and peace. Our salvation depends in it.*

Mercy. The very word denotes compassion, forgiveness and understanding. True mercy, our Holy Father tells us, demands justice. The mercy God gives us demands justice. In His infinite wisdom, God has anointed each one of us with the call of living the Gospel in a special way. That anointing, that call, comes with the responsibility to be and do mercy, love, peace and justice. The Secular Franciscan Order is not just another group we join because we enjoy the socials and the prayers. It is a living call to be the face of mercy to one another. It is a living call to be the face of justice to those who are on the margins of society. It is a living call to be the face of our Lord and Redeemer, to those who, for whatever reason, cannot see his face anywhere else. We, as Secular Franciscans, have been called to be the face of mercy in the marketplace, in the workplace, in the mean streets of a society that does not want to recognize that merciful face.

I have been privileged to travel around the country speaking with fraternities and regions about JPIC. But I do not speak about the Franciscan Commission of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation. I speak about being and doing love, being and doing mercy, being and doing empathy and compassion. I speak about being and doing the Gospel, from which springs our Holy Rule. This is the very heart of justice and peace. Being and doing love and mercy is how we love and care for one another. This is

justice. This is peace. This is living in harmony with all of God's creation.

The Franciscan face of mercy endures, because God's mercy endures forever, as the Psalmist intones. To let go of anger, violence, and revenge is a necessary condition to living joyfully, to being the face of mercy. Blessed are the merciful, Jesus tells us, for they shall obtain mercy. To receive mercy, we must extend mercy. When we extend violence and wrath, we get more of the same in return. As Franciscans, we have been called to a higher standard. Mediocrity is not acceptable. We have not been called to mediocrity. We must strive for excellence in the Kingdom of God. We will not do it perfectly, and we will fall; after all, we suffer from human frailty. We also suffer from "people-itis." Life is filled with people! If there were no people, then we *would* be perfect! Since our world is so "peopley," moment to moment conversion is necessary. How great that we have a Savior who understands because he hung out with 12 of those people!

As the Church, we are commissioned to announce the mercy of God, the beating heart of the Gospel, which in its own way must penetrate the heart and mind of every person (MV, 12). How are you being and doing the Franciscan face of mercy to those people you come in contact with? Especially the "peopley" ones – those who push your non-Franciscan buttons or cut you off in traffic and give you the peace sign with one finger? Can you extend mercy to them? Will you extend mercy to them? No one said this would be easy. Pope Francis reminds us that without a witness to mercy, life becomes fruitless and sterile, as if sequestered in a barren desert. Our call is to witness to mercy; to be the Franciscan face of mercy. May the Lord grant you peace and mercy on your journey.