

Mercy K of C

There is a saying about issues and debates: “he who controls the language, controls the argument.” Common understanding of language and precision are essential to truth. For example, to explain his philosophy, Plato told stories where his main character, Socrates, would engage in a conversation another person of differing opinion. The first thing Socrates did was define terms so that the two were talking about the same thing.

It is the year of mercy. To promote it, words like justice, adultery, sodomy, infidelity, fornication, all seem to have to be silenced and even the wording of the church teaching needs to be changed in order to promote mercy according to some church prelates. Ludicrous.

Laying the foundation in fact and true history is another essential element which causes sophistry and error. Some speakers are quite free with facts and history to establish their point. When these are corrected, their arguments fail.

An appeal to authority is another argument fallacy. If a person arguing quotes an authority who has no power to issue a binding statement, it cannot be a basis for truth. This has been common for people who quote one prelate in the church, even if it be the pope, without the entire context of the scripture and tradition of Holy Church.

We want mercy. We want it now. We want it as God gives it, not as man says it should be.

“Mercy without justice is the mother of dissolution; justice without mercy is cruelty.” -- *Thomas Aquinas*

Mercy can't mean whatever you want it to mean to promote your agenda. Is it merciful to give your drug addicted friend money to buy more drugs to “ease” the moment's suffering when they're coming down from narcotics abuse? Is it merciful to allow your unwed children to sleep together at your home because it might lead them to marriage or that their feelings might be hurt? Is it merciful to keep doling out money in welfare with no job training or help in developing a work ethic or real job development? Is it merciful to allow people to kill the children in the womb so that that woman can have a better life? Is it merciful to approve same sex acts so as not to be judgmental and to make people feel included? Is it merciful to allow men dressed as women to use the ladies' restroom? Is it merciful to allow those with gender identity disorder to be included in everything as if it were all normal? Is it merciful to allow women into the clergy because someone says it is discrimination not to do so? Is it merciful to insist on increased salaries and wages for workers even if it will bankrupt the business or put other workers out of work? Is it merciful to insist on holy communion for anyone who comes into our church regardless of their belief in the Real Presence, belief in God or the Catholic church, or the state of grace or sin in their soul?

These are some of the questions being asked or insisted upon through mercy in the church today. And those who ask them usually offer muddled wordy responses that confuse rather than clarify. I have read papal documents and articles by bishops and priests in which I, a man with 3 masters degrees, leave more confused than when I started reading. I have heard those same people spout made up propositions and say deceitfully that they have always been part of church teaching. We don't need a one world order subject to man, but we do need to bring about one world according to and in Jesus Christ.

In order to be merciful, we have to know what it is, what the source of mercy is, how to obtain it, how to exercise it, and what is mercy and what is merely indulgence.

In speaking of God, man might be a good starting point so that we can see the difference between the creature and the creator.

St. Thomas Aquinas develops a unity of all things using the metaphysics of Aristotle. He says that man has 5 powers. The first are vegetative, automatic things that work without our thought or control: heartbeat, digestion, etc. The second which distinguishes animals from plants is locomotion: we can move. The third power are the passions, our emotions such as love, desire, delight, joy, hate, fear, anger daring. Often they move us to act without thinking, such as when someone cuts you off on the freeway and your mouth opens and your hands raise with

fingers extended to bless them; or when that pretty woman walks by, and your eyes turn toward her once, twice, three times.

The bible tells us that we are made in the image and likeness of God. The fourth power is the intellect, the ability to remember information and to process it. The greatest power is the will: the ability to make a decision and to execute it based on reason, a sound judgment from the intellect and the emotions.

God is pure love, charity. Charity is humility, trust, tolerance, gentleness, generosity, kindness, patience, pardon, endurance in Himself and toward men. God does what he wills from his intellect. He is not subject to unruly passions as are men, even though in the scripture, jealousy and anger are attributed to him so that men can understand the righteousness and reasonableness of His actions. Our acquisition of charity is the virtue that unites us with God, making us more like Him. Virtues are movements of the will which make us like God. Charity is the greatest of all virtues.

Mercy is God's chief attribute. Mercy is the giving of something that is not due a person: a reward simply out of love, or the tempering of a punishment that is due in justice, out of that same love. Mercy is to dispel the misery that takes away happiness. The motivation of mercy from God is that he loves his creatures and wishes their goodness. The motivation of mercy from men is that we share in the sorrows and defects of others, so it moves our hearts to grant mercy. For man then, the affection, the feeling moves him to the effect, the act of mercy.

For God, there is no sharing in the defect, so He gives mercy fully out of love.

The defects in a person's life give rise to misery and take away happiness. God

Justice comes from mercy. He does not operate from emotion, but from intellect and will. Justice is giving to the other what is due Him.

The Relationship of Mercy and Justice According to St. Thomas Aquinas

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Thomas does not understand divine mercy as a feeling or a passion that overwhelms God. It is not affective but effective, by healing the defects of the creatures and making them participate in the divine perfection.

Prof. Thomas Heinrich Stark

~~We have heard a lot about (the new) mercy during the past months, and with respect to the (sometimes strange and surprising) topics discussed at the Extraordinary Synod on the Family. The remarks of some of the participants in the debates gave the impression that the insistence on truth—and on justice based on truth—is indicative of a merciless mentality. Does that mean that in order to be merciful we have to reduce our emphasis on truth and justice? And so the broader question arises:~~

What is the correct relation between mercy and justice according to the traditional teaching of the Church? In order to

answer this question it is useful to take a brief look to St. Thomas Aquinas.

In unfolding his concept of justice, Thomas Aquinas follows Aristotle. He defines justice as the cardinal virtue which leads a person to give respectively to everyone that to which he is entitled or that he owes him. The aim of justice is the common good.

1807 *Justice* is the moral virtue that consists in the constant and firm will to give their due to God and neighbor. Justice toward God is called the "virtue of religion." Justice toward men disposes one to respect the rights of each and to establish in human relationships the harmony that promotes equity with regard to persons and to the common good. The just man, often mentioned in the Sacred Scriptures, is distinguished by habitual right thinking and the uprightness of his conduct toward his neighbor. "You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor."⁶⁸ "Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven."

But the circumstances under which justice is to be granted can be of various types. Therefore it is necessary to distinguish between different manifestations of the general principle of justice. In the case where the individual owes something to society, he has to follow that justice which is in accordance with the law (*justitia legalis*). If it is society that owes something to the individual, distributive justice (*justitia distributiva*) has to be applied. If an individual owes something to another

individual, their relationship is to be regulated according to commutative justice (*justitia commutativa*).

However, there are cases in which an individual or group lacks that to which this person or group is entitled because it is necessary for its survival or at least essential for its good life. Such lack does not necessarily have its origin in unjust conditions, but is often due to ethically neutral circumstances. This is the situation in which mercy comes into play. Thomas adopts Augustine's definition of mercy as compassion in declaring, "Mercy is the compassion of our heart when considering the misery of another person".

However, mercy is not confined to a mere sense or feeling of compassion. Rather someone is only merciful if he actively strives to avert the misery of others that touches his heart, in the same way that he tries to avert a misery that oppresses him himself. Because it is the distinctive feature of the affective compassion of mercy, that it—as Thomas expresses it—"moves us to do what we can do to help the other." **Only if the *affective* aspect of compassion is complemented by the *effective* aspect producing a truly helpful assistance can mercy manifest itself as that act of charity that recognizes the other**—again, as Thomas puts it—as "another self". Therefore only if the feeling of compassion is ordered according to the rules of reason, does it become the virtue of mercy.

In contrast to the Stoics and other authors of pagan antiquity who saw compassion as a vice, Thomas called mercy the greatest of all virtues, because it pours itself out upon others, whose weakness it endeavors to remedy. Therefore, mercy

constitutes a difference in rank, because if someone comes to the aid of a weaker person, he, by precisely that fact, proves to be superior to him. So compassion is not—as pagan antiquity believed—a sign of weakness, but rather an outstanding sign of strength and magnanimous generosity. It is therefore obvious that charity is considered to be the one essential characteristic of God, by which the omnipotence of God is most clearly revealed (cf. 1 Jn 4:8).

Now a specific feature of the ethics of St. Thomas is that it puts compassion and justice into the closest connection possible to each other. “Justice without mercy is cruel”, says Thomas. But, “Mercy without justice is the mother of dissolution” —and, one might add, therefore cruel as well. This close connection between justice and mercy is not sufficiently obvious in human life. The reason for this is not merely the fact that people are often merciless. Rather, it is much more due to the finite character of human existence, which makes all the virtues in the life of the soul appear to be separated from each other and their exercise separate as well. This of course also applies to the virtues of justice and charity, the juxtaposition of which may highlight this fact of separation with particular clarity, so that justice and mercy may sometimes appear to us as as downright opposing intentions.

The situation is different with God. “The work of divine justice always presupposes the work of mercy and it founded in it,” says Thomas. So if God is merciful, then He is not in opposition to justice. That is because in God, unlike in man, justice and mercy are not separated from one another according

to their being, although due to our human means of knowing them we must continue to distinguish them by name, and thus speak of them with distinct terms. In short, we are not able to grasp the nature of God in its entirety and in its unity but always only from a certain, finite perspective. So we recognize God as love, as omnipotent, as omniscient, as merciful, and so forth, without being able adequately to imagine that all these attributions form an inseparable unity, because they are identical with each according to their being. That means we have a knowledge of God that overstrains our imagination.

However, it does not follow from the unity of God's justice and mercy that God's justice is completely dissolved in his mercy. Therefore the restitution that is required by justice does not become superfluous as a result of mercy. That is to say that sin is at the same time an insult to God and a violation of the divine order of things. Justice requires the restoration of the violated order in the sinner himself as well outside of himself.

This restoration is carried out by means of a penalty that does not contradict charity, but springs from charity. Penalty is the manner in which the sinner experiences the fire of divine love.

Thomas therefore does not understand divine mercy as a feeling or a passion that overwhelms God. It is not affective but effective, by healing the defects of the creatures and making them participate in the divine perfection. Therefore, the redemption that is offered by God because of his mercy is a far greater work even than his Creation.

From this fact further conclusions can now be drawn, and we have already mentioned the crucial keywords needed to draw them in using the terms Creation and Redemption. We only understand the drama of human life if we understand that it due to the very beginning and the final end of all things. Therefore it is essential to note the fact that Creation and the last things are not merely significant metaphors for the purpose of indicating some meaning, but are genuine realities.

God has indeed created the world. The order of things, as well as life and mind , did not merely somehow “emerge” from matter. The order of things is the will of God, who calls us— together with the entire cosmos—into being and keeps us in existence. God also in fact wants to redeem us, because we are in need of salvation, since we are caught up in sin. But sin is directed against the order of things and thus against the conditions of our own existence. Sin is utterly self-destructive; we are hardly able to imagine the actual hideousness of sin. We can only form a vague image of it when we consider the price paid by Jesus Christ on the cross for our salvation.

And eventually there will be a final judgment and— according to what we know from the Holy Scriptures and Tradition—a purgatory as preparation for heaven or the damnation of those who persist in their rejection of God. God, in giving us true freedom, can neither undo the consequences which result from our decisions nor those that result from his decisions. Salvation according to the motto “let bygones be bygones” is therefore a logical impossibility and a mockery of reason and hence of the *logos*.

We cannot give up or reduce these truths to bare images, which can be so appealing to our emotions, without abandoning the Faith. For faith is not primarily about feelings but about truth. And when it comes to emotions, such as in a compassionate mercy, it can only be a matter of shaping our feelings in accordance with the order of reason—and that is in accordance with truth.

Misery is a condition that a person experiences when he suffers against his will. But there are forms of misery—for whose supposed remedy mercy is invoked—which, when seen in the whole picture, are not possible to remove without the concomitant production of further, perhaps even greater misery---even if this fact is not immediately obvious. However, since all suffering is ultimately always caused by a disturbance of order, and as the disturbance of the order is the very essence of injustice, any infringement of justice always causes misery, affecting others as well oneself—although, again, this correlation goes unnoticed in many situations. There are therefore erroneous forms of mercy, which turn out to be forms of cruelty upon closer inspection.

Finally, one thing should not be forgotten in this context: the works of mercy include the spiritual works of teaching the ignorant and rebuking the sinner, the neglect of which also increases misery.

Given that kind of misery which cannot be eliminated without damaging justice, the only way out of the dilemma is this: the acceptance by the very person who does not will the suffering that this particular misery causes by keeping his eyes

fixed on the suffering of Christ on the Cross. This advice may sound at times unbearable—as it is also to my own ears, if I may make that personal remark. Nevertheless, it is and remains the only advice that one can give for the consolation of those mourning in situations of this kind. Because true justice is not merciless and true mercy is not sentimental.

St. Thomas Aquinas on the Virtue of Mercy

DM 101: Week 18

By Dr. Robert Stackpole, STD (Nov 4, 2005)

St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) defined the virtue of "mercy" in his great *Summa Theologiae* (ST II-II.30.1) as "the compassion in our hearts for another person's misery, a compassion which drives us to do what we can to help him." For St. Thomas this virtue has two aspects: "affective" mercy and "effective" mercy.

Affective mercy is an emotion: the pity we feel for the plight of another. In this respect, St. Thomas says, human mercy is grounded in a "defect" in our nature: the defect of human vulnerability to suffering. We feel pity for those who suffer because we too are subject to such miseries. Thus, our affective sympathy for others arises from our capacity for empathy. St. Thomas notes: "Those who reckon themselves happy and so powerful that no ill may befall them are not so compassionate" (II-II.30.2). To some extent, however, the intensity of our affective mercy for the plight of another also depends upon how closely we are united to others in friendship

(II-II.30.2): "The person who loves regards his friend as another self, and so he counts his friend's troubles as his own, and grieves over them as if they were his own." An affective bond, we might say, easily forms between friends, and this renders good friends all the more capable of sympathy for each other's plight.

Effective mercy, on the other hand, is something that we do, a positive action for the good of another, taking steps to relieve the miseries or meet the needs of others. According to St. Thomas, the Latin word "misericordia" literally means "having a miserable heart" — both affectively and effectively — for another person's misery.

St. Thomas observes that there are three kinds of "misery" in this life. First, there is the suffering that goes against our natural appetite for existence and life, such as the misery of a sick man. Secondly, there is suffering that strikes us suddenly and unexpectedly, such as sufferings arising from accidents. The third kind of suffering, however, is the worst of all: suffering that strikes a person when he consistently pursues the good, yet he meets only overpowering evil. St. Thomas here has in mind those sufferings and misfortunes that strike those who in no way deserve them, the undeserved miseries of the innocent and the virtuous.

St. Thomas argues that the human virtue of mercy necessarily will be both affective and effective. However, to be the authentic

virtue of "mercy," it must manifest two additional characteristics. First, it must be rooted in "right reason" — that is, in the truth about the sufferings of others, and what is in fact the objective "good" for the other whom we seek to help. Secondly, the virtue of mercy is proven in effective action for the good of others, as circumstances permit. If we merely "sympathize" with the plight of another and "share their pain" without making the best of the opportunities we have to help them, then virtue of mercy does not abide in us in any significant degree.

St. Thomas asks two related questions. First, is mercy the greatest of the human virtues? It certainly implies a measure of grandeur and nobility, insofar as effective mercy is the generous relief of the needs and miseries of others out of one's own abundance. We help others out of our store of wealth, or knowledge or skill or strength, when we see others in need of such help. In that sense, mercy is an act of condescension from one person who has a greater abundance of some good to another person lacking in some good. If the merciful person has a superior (that is, someone with an even greater abundance of goods to share) then his chief virtue will be what unites him with his superior. In the case of human beings, the virtue of "charity" is what unites him to God (since God is not in need of our mercy!): "Since man, therefore, has God above him, charity which unites him to God is greater than mercy, which relieves the wants of others" (II-II.30.4). On the other hand, when we consider which of the virtues should govern our relationships

with other human beings, then it is clear that mercy directed to our neighbors in need is the supreme virtue in man (II-II.30.4).

Secondly, St. Thomas asks: Is mercy the greatest attribute of God? Since God is the absolute superior, the perfect and self-existent creator, St. Thomas says, He is never self-seeking, but acts only and always with selfless generosity, pouring out good gifts out of His abundance on his creatures. Showing mercy is therefore proper to God in a special way, for it manifests His infinite perfection, and His infinite abundance and generosity. St. Thomas writes (II-II.30.4): "If we consider a virtue in terms of its possessor, however, we can say that mercy is the greatest of the virtues only if its possessor is himself the greatest of all beings, with no one above him and everyone beneath him." This, of course, is properly true only of God Himself. Thus, mercy is, in that sense, the greatest attribute of God.

Mercy precedes Justice. Mercy is the act of giving when nothing is deserved or of limiting the punishment that is deserved. Once mercy is given, justice, the obligation to give what is due, comes into play. For example, by mercy, God and our parents grant us life. After that justice demands that they nurture us to the point where we can function on our own to a degree. Justice also demands that we respect them.

Jesus' mercy vs justice in the bible.

Mercy: created the whole world for man and put him in charge of it.

Justice: deprived of eternal life, divine teaching,

Mercy: sewed clothing of leather, allowed death so that man would not suffer his error eternally, and promised salvation in Eve's struggle with the serpent.

Justice: the death of Cain for the slaying of Abel

Mercy: marking Cain so that no one would kill him as he did his brother

Justice: Cain having to bear the memory of killing his own brother

Mercy: God granting Eve another son, Cain another brother

Justice: the destruction of the evil humanity at the time of Noah

Mercy: the salvation of humanity through Noah and his family

Justice: God calls Abraham and guides him to Palestine

Mercy: God gives him victory over his enemies and recovers his nephew Lot.

Justice: Sodom and Gomorrah are destroyed because of their evil deeds

Mercy: Lot and his family are spared because of their innocence.

Justice: Lot's wife looked back to Sodom and was turned to a pillar of salt

Mercy: Lot and his family settled in a new city

Justice: Killing of the firstborn of those who enslaved the Hebrews

Mercy: Passover for those who believed in the blood of the lamb of God

Justice: God threatening to destroy the unfaithful Hebrews in the desert

Mercy: God answering Moses' prayer to save them

Justice: Seraph serpents to bite and kill the disobedient

Mercy: The bronze serpent to save them

Justice: The sufferings of David for his sins

Mercy: The kingdom staying within his line

Justice: Stoning for the woman caught in adultery

Mercy: Forgiveness and power not to sin from Jesus toward her

Justice: Physical blindness for Saul's spiritual blindness

Mercy: Great spiritual sight after Paul's baptism

Justice: The suffering of the drug abuser from withdrawal.

Mercy: Suffering with him/her during withdrawal to grant sobriety

Justice: Teaching fornicating children to sleep separately

Mercy: Keeping them from mortal sin

Justice: Limiting payments to those who do not work

Mercy: Giving them back their dignity as productive citizens

Justice: Stop killing children in the womb

Mercy: Saving the life of a child and the soul of the mother

Justice: Just discrimination against same sex acts

Mercy: Helping people to accept their given sexual identity as male or female

Justice: Not indulging cross dressers in their trans fantasies

Mercy: Assisting them in addressing the underlying psyche that causes this

Justice: An all male priesthood as created by Christ

Mercy: Subsidiarity of male and female laity to exercise the common priesthood