*Evangelii Gaudium: the Joy of the Gospel*

Some images and ideas of ‘mercy’ expressed in EG:

1. Father and son in Luke’s parable of the prodigal
2. A welcoming home, with doors wide open
3. The capacity to weep, to express empathy
4. Interfaith connections
5. Mercy as blessing
6. Mercy as imitation of Christ who reveals to us the face of the Father
7. Mercy as generosity, bigness of heart, outreaching
8. Mercy as a response to the other’s ‘neediness’
9. The relationship between mercy, judgement, justice
10. Mercy and the ‘option for the poor’ (God shows the poor “his first mercy”. See EG 198)
11. Mercy and freedom (“God’s mercy has willed that we should be free”. See EG, 43. Citing Augustine, Aquinas)
12. Mercy and Eucharist: a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak. (See EG, 47)
13. Mercy and sacrament of Reconciliation: the Confessional is not a torture chamber!

Highlighted are 34 references to ‘mercy’ in EG. (Other key words: forgiveness, compassion, gentleness.)

#3. How good it feels to come back to him whenever we are lost! Let me say this once more: God never tires of forgiving us; we are the ones who tire of seeking his mercy. Christ, who told us to forgive one another “seventy times seven” (*Mt* 18:22) has given us his example: he has forgiven us seventy times seven.

#24. Such a community [the church] has an endless desire to show mercy, the fruit of its own experience of the power of the Father’s infinite mercy. Let us try a little harder to take the first step and to become involved.

#37. Thomas thus explains that, as far as external works are concerned, mercy is the greatest of all the virtues: “In itself mercy is the greatest of the virtues, since all the others revolve around it and, more than this, it makes up for their deficiencies. This is particular to the superior virtue, and as such it is proper to God to have mercy, through which his omnipotence is manifested to the greatest degree”.[[41]](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn41%22%20%5Co%20%22)

[[41]](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftnref41%22%20%5Co%20%22)  *S. Th*., II-II, q. 30, a. 4: “We do not worship God with sacrifices and exterior gifts for him, but rather for us and for our neighbour. He has no need of our sacrifices, but he does ask that these be offered by us as devotion and for the benefit of our neighbour. For him, mercy, which overcomes the defects of our devotion and sacrifice, is the sacrifice which is most pleasing, because it is mercy which above all seeks the good of one’s neighbour” ( *S. Th*., II-II, q. 30, a. 4, ad 1).

#43. Citing Saint Augustine, [Aquinas] noted that the precepts subsequently enjoined by the Church should be insisted upon with moderation “so as not to burden the lives of the faithful” and make our religion a form of servitude, whereas “God’s mercy has willed that we should be free”.[[48]](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn48%22%20%5Co%20%22) This warning, issued many centuries ago, is most timely today. It ought to be one of the criteria to be taken into account in considering a reform of the Church and her preaching which would enable it to reach everyone.

#44. [Priests] need to accompany with mercy and patience the eventual stages of personal growth as these progressively occur.[[50]](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn50%22%20%5Co%20%22) I want to remind priests that the confessional must not be a torture chamber but rather an encounter with the Lord’s mercy which spurs us on to do our best.

#54. To sustain a lifestyle which excludes others, or to sustain enthusiasm for that selfish ideal, a globalization of indifference has developed. Almost without being aware of it, we end up being incapable of feeling compassion at the outcry of the poor, weeping for other people’s pain, and feeling a need to help them, as though all this were someone else’s responsibility and not our own.

#99-100. Our world is being torn apart by wars and violence, and wounded by a widespread individualism which divides human beings, setting them against one another as they pursue their own well-being. In various countries, conflicts and old divisions from the past are re-emerging. I especially ask Christians in communities throughout the world to offer a radiant and attractive witness of fraternal communion… Those wounded by historical divisions find it difficult to accept our invitation to forgiveness and reconciliation, since they think that we are ignoring their pain or are asking them to give up their memory and ideals.

#112. The salvation which God offers us is the work of his mercy. No human efforts, however good they may be, can enable us to merit so great a gift.

#114. The Church must be a place of mercy freely given, where everyone can feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to live the good life of the Gospel.

#164. The fire of the Spirit is given in the form of tongues and leads us to believe in Jesus Christ who, by his death and resurrection, reveals and communicates to us the Father’s infinite mercy. On the lips of the catechist the first proclamation must ring out over and over: “Jesus Christ loves you; he gave his life to save you; and now he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen and free you.”

#169. In a culture paradoxically suffering from anonymity and at the same time obsessed with the details of other people’s lives, shamelessly given over to morbid curiosity, the Church must look more closely and sympathetically at others whenever necessary. In our world, ordained ministers and other pastoral workers can make present the fragrance of Christ’s closeness and his personal gaze. The Church will have to initiate everyone – priests, religious and laity – into this “art of accompaniment” which teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other (cf. *Ex* 3:5). The pace of this accompaniment must be steady and reassuring, reflecting our closeness and our compassionate gaze which also heals, liberates and encourages growth in the Christian life.

#171. Today more than ever we need men and women who, on the basis of their experience of accompanying others…We need to practice the art of listening, which is more than simply hearing. Listening, in communication, is an openness of heart which makes possible that closeness without which genuine spiritual encounter cannot occur. Listening helps us to find the right gesture and word which shows that we are more than simply bystanders. Only through such respectful and compassionate listening can we enter on the paths of true growth and awaken a yearning for the Christian ideal: the desire to respond fully to God’s love and to bring to fruition what he has sown in our lives.

#179. The way we treat others has a transcendent dimension: “The measure you give will be the measure you get” (*Mt* 7:2). It corresponds to the mercy which God has shown us: “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you… For the measure you give will be the measure you get back” (*Lk* 6:36-38)…. By her very nature the Church is missionary; she abounds in effective charity and a compassion which understands, assists and promotes.

#188. “The Church, guided by the Gospel of mercy and by love for mankind,hears the cry for justice and intends to respond to it with all her might”.[[153]](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn153%22%20%5Co%20%22) In this context we can understand Jesus’ command to his disciples: “You yourselves give them something to eat!” (*Mk* 6:37): it means working to eliminate the structural causes of poverty and to promote the integral development of the poor, as well as small daily acts of solidarity in meeting the real needs which we encounter.

#193. We incarnate the duty of hearing the cry of the poor when we are deeply moved by the suffering of others. Let us listen to what God’s word teaches us about mercy, and allow that word to resound in the life of the Church. The Gospel tells us: “Blessed are the merciful, because they shall obtain mercy” (*Mt* 5:7). The apostle James teaches that our mercy to others will vindicate us on the day of God’s judgment: “So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy, yet mercy triumphs over judgment” (*Jas* 2:12-13). Here James is faithful to the finest tradition of post-exilic Jewish spirituality, which attributed a particular salutary value to mercy: “Break off your sins by practising righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed, that there may perhaps be a lengthening of your tranquillity” (*Dan* 4:27). The wisdom literature sees almsgiving as a concrete exercise of mercy towards those in need: “Almsgiving delivers from death, and it will purge away every sin” (*Tob* 12:9). The idea is expressed even more graphically by Sirach: “Water extinguishes blazing fire: so almsgiving atones for sin” (*Sir* 3:30). The same synthesis appears in the New Testament: “Maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins” (*1 Pet* 4:8)*.* This truth greatly influenced the thinking of the Fathers of the Church and helped create a prophetic, counter-cultural resistance to the self-centred hedonism of paganism. We can recall a single example: “If we were in peril from fire, we would certainly run to water in order to extinguish the fire… in the same way, if a spark of sin flares up from our straw, and we are troubled on that account, whenever we have an opportunity to perform a work of mercy, we should rejoice, as if a fountain opened before so that the fire might be extinguished”.[[160]](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn160%22%20%5Co%20%22)

#194. This message is so clear and direct, so simple and eloquent, that no ecclesial interpretation has the right to relativize it. The Church’s reflection on these texts ought not to obscure or weaken their force, but urge us to accept their exhortations with courage and zeal. Why complicate something so simple? Conceptual tools exist to heighten contact with the realities they seek to explain, not to distance us from them. This is especially the case with those biblical exhortations which summon us so forcefully to brotherly love, to humble and generous service, to justice and mercy towards the poor. Jesus taught us this way of looking at others by his words and his actions. So why cloud something so clear? We should not be concerned simply about falling into doctrinal error, but about remaining faithful to this light-filled path of life and wisdom.

#197. [Jesus] assured those burdened by sorrow and crushed by poverty that God has a special place for them in his heart: “Blessed are you poor, yours is the kingdom of God” (*Lk* 6:20); he made himself one of them: “I was hungry and you gave me food to eat”, and he taught them that mercy towards all of these is the key to heaven (cf. *Mt* 25:5ff.).

#198. For the Church, the option for the poor is primarily a theological category rather than a cultural, sociological, political or philosophical one. God shows the poor “his first mercy”.[[163]](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn163%22%20%5Co%20%22) This divine preference has consequences for the faith life of all Christians, since we are called to have “this mind… which was in Jesus Christ” (*Phil* 2:5).

#252. [Muslims] also acknowledge the need to respond to God with an ethical commitment and with mercy towards those most in need.

#285. On the cross, when Jesus endured in his own flesh the dramatic encounter of the sin of the world and God’s mercy, he could feel at his feet the consoling presence of his mother and his friend.

Other relevant references:

#46. A Church which “goes forth” is a Church whose doors are open. Going out to others in order to reach the fringes of humanity does not mean rushing out aimlessly into the world. Often it is better simply to slow down, to put aside our eagerness in order to see and listen to others, to stop rushing from one thing to another and to remain with someone who has faltered along the way. At times we have to be like the father of the prodigal son, who always keeps his door open so that when the son returns, he can readily pass through it.

#47. The Church is called to be the house of the Father, with doors always wide open. One concrete sign of such openness is that our church doors should always be open, so that if someone, moved by the Spirit, comes there looking for God, he or she will not find a closed door. There are other doors that should not be closed either. Everyone can share in some way in the life of the Church; everyone can be part of the community, nor should the doors of the sacraments be closed for simply any reason. This is especially true of the sacrament which is itself “the door”: baptism. The Eucharist, although it is the fullness of sacramental life, is not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak.[[51]](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn51%22%20%5Co%20%22) These convictions have pastoral consequences that we are called to consider with prudence and boldness. Frequently, we act as arbiters of grace rather than its facilitators. But the Church is not a tollhouse; it is the house of the Father, where there is a place for everyone, with all their problems.

#271. It is true that in our dealings with the world, we are told to give reasons for our hope, but not as an enemy who critiques and condemns. We are told quite clearly: “do so with gentleness and reverence” (*1 Pet* 3:15)