

# “God’s Love and God’s Mercy”

## Introduction

When I first began to read "*Deus Caritas Est*" I was delighted with what Pope Benedict had written. There was a freshness and scholarship about it that was intellectually and spiritually satisfying and stimulating. As I read further into the encyclical a question began to form in my mind and heart. With each page I found myself saying, "He must mention it soon." But there I was reading the signature on the last page and no mention of "*Divine Mercy*". "How", I asked myself, and this was not by way of criticism of the Holy Father but rather disbelief and incomprehension, "How can you write an encyclical on "*Christian Love*" without mentioning the greatest Divine Attribute, *Mercy*?"

After 25 years of Pope John Paul II proclaiming the urgency of the message of Divine Mercy for the world today, I was mystified by Pope Benedict's total silence. I had not expected him to repeat all that his predecessor had said about the importance of Divine Mercy, but, as I say, I was mystified that no reference had been made to Mercy which is itself an expression of love.

And so, having read the encyclical both privately and with a study group I was left with this question as to why the Holy Father had made no mention of Divine Mercy in an encyclical on Christian Love? I realized that there was something that I was missing, and I sat with this question for six or seven months.

In October I accompanied a group of German pilgrims to the Divine Mercy Sanctuary in Krakow and I took this question to Jesus, Divine Mercy Incarnate and to St. Faustina, his secretary of Divine Mercy. "Lord Jesus, St. Faustina, what is the relationship between "*Love*" and "*Mercy*"? In the Diary of St. Faustina she quotes Jesus as saying: "*Tell the world about My mercy and My love Tell, that I am Love and Mercy itself.*" [1074] "So, Lord; so, St. Faustina, what is what?"

The answer came quite quickly: Love defines the *essence* of God; that is, '*what God is*'. St. John the Evangelist gives us this very definition in his 1st Letter: "*God is Love*" [1 Jn 4:8] and because God is *eternal and infinite*, without beginning or end, so too is "*Love*" - it is *eternal and infinite*, without beginning or end. Pope Benedict has chosen his 1<sup>st</sup> Encyclical to proclaim to the Church and the world that "*God is Love*". [cf p2. Introduction to "*Deus Caritas Est*"]

*"Deus Caritas Est"*  
Pope Benedict XVI, 2005  
*On Christian Love*

"In a world where the name of God is sometimes associated with vengeance or even a duty of hatred and violence, this message is both timely and significant. For this reason, I wish in my first Encyclical to speak of the love which God lavishes upon us and which we in turn must share with others. That, in essence, is what the two main parts of this Letter are about, and they are profoundly interconnected. The first part is more speculative, since I wanted here - at the beginning of my Pontificate - to clarify some essential facts concerning the love which God mysteriously and gratuitously offers to man, together with the intrinsic link between that Love and the reality of human love. The second part is more concrete, since it treats the ecclesial exercise of the commandment of love of neighbour. The argument has vast implications, but a lengthy treatment would go beyond the scope of the present encyclical. I wish to emphasize some basic elements, so as to call forth in the world renewed energy and commitment in the human response to God's love. [Introduction n.1 §3]

On the other hand, Pope John Paul II in his 2nd Encyclical *"Dives in Misericordia"* [Rich in Mercy] proclaimed to the Church and the world the urgency of the Message of Divine Mercy. Mercy is described as the *greatest attribute* of God, the great quality belonging to God *alone* in his relationship with His Creation *after the Fall*. Where as Love is *eternal and infinite*, Mercy is *temporal and finite* it began with the original sin of Adam and will last until the Second Coming of Jesus as the Just Judge.

The Lord makes this absolutely clear in St. Faustina's *Diary* when he has her write: "Write this: before I come as the just Judge, I am coming first as the King of Mercy." [83] and "Write down these words, My daughter, speak to the world about My mercy; let all mankind recognize My unfathomable mercy. It is a sign for the end times; after it will come the day of justice. While there is still time, let them have recourse to the fount of My mercy ..." [848]

*"Divine Mercy"* is for this world only, where as *"Divine Love"* is eternal. *"Divine Love"* is the reason and goal of our existence: we are made in the image and likeness of God who is Love; we are created in order to share eternally the life of God, who is Love; therefore, *"Divine Love"* is our destiny. It is eternal life. *"Divine Mercy"* is, on the other hand, the Divine means to attain this goal, to life. *"Divine Mercy"* is, on

the other hand, the Divine means to attain this goal, to realize our destiny as adopted children of the Merciful Father, co-heirs with Christ and Temples of the Holy Spirit. The Liturgy of the Church summarizes this beautifully in praying:

*"In love you created man,  
in justice you condemned him,  
but in mercy you redeemed him,... "*  
[Common Preface II]

That we might find it difficult to get our heads around the difference between the *Divine Essence, Love*, and the *Greatest Divine Attribute, Mercy*, is small consequence in the face of this mystery. It is also good for our humility. But that we can be certain that *God is Love* and that *Mercy is the greatest attribute of the Loving God in relationship to sinful humanity through which he restores us to the lost Communion of Love* is beyond question. On the one hand the Holy Scriptures proclaim that this is so, and on the other hand the highest authority of the Church certifies the supernatural origin and authenticity of the content of the *Diary* of St. Faustina.

*"Dives in Misericordia"*

Pope John Paul II, 1980

*On the Mercy of God*

"For the mystery of God the 'Father of mercies' revealed by Christ becomes, in the context of today's threats to man, as it were a unique appeal addressed to the Church.

"In this present Encyclical I wish to accept this appeal; I wish to draw from the eternal and at the same time - for its simplicity and depth - incomparable language of revelation and faith, in order through this same language to express once more before God and before humanity the major anxieties of our time.

"In fact, revelation and faith teach us not--only to-meditate in-the abstract-upon' - the mystery of God as 'Father of mercies', but also to have recourse to that mercy in the name of Christ and in union with him. Did not Christ say that our Father, who 'sees in secret' [Mt 6:4, 6, 18], is always waiting for us to have recourse to him in every need and always waiting for us to study his mystery: the mystery of the Father and his love? [cf Eph 3:18; Lk 11:5-13]

"I therefore wish these considerations to bring this mystery closer to everyone. At the same time I wish them to be a heartfelt appeal by the Church to mercy, which humanity and the modern world need so much. And they need mercy even though they often do not realize it." [n.2 §§ 6,7,8]

## Conclusion

The mystification as to why Pope Benedict was silent about the importance of "*Divine Mercy*" in this, his first encyclical, '*On Christian Love*', has now disappeared. He states clearly in the Introduction to "*Deus Caritas Est*" his purpose in writing it: "*I want here - at the beginning of my Pontificate - to clarify some essential facts concerning the love which God mysteriously and gratuitously offers to man, together with the intrinsic link between that Love and the reality of human love.*" It is a limitless topic because it touches on the very *eternal infinity* of God, who is Love, and he intends "*to clarify some essential facts concerning*" love, not everything to do with it. Therefore, in the face of the distorted current world view of he rightly proclaims *Love* as the source and summit of Human and Christian life because "*God is Love*". In doing so he is redirecting man to look again at where he has come from, where he is going, and some of the means necessary to attain the *Communion of Love*, which is, at the same time, our origin, present life and destiny. This task will be successful *only* by starting from the very *essence* of *Love: God, who is Love*. Although "*Divine Mercy*" is present as "*the greatest attribute of God*" it is "*an attribute and not the essence of God*" it does not fall under the scope of this encyclical.

That Pope John Paul II proclaimed "*Divine Mercy*" as the most urgent message for "*aching humanity*" to receive at this time remains valid and necessary because it is the final and greatest grace offered which guarantees the world and the individual *healing and peace*. Although *Mercy* is limited to this world it has its flows out of the *eternal and infinite Love of God*, the source of all grace, so that Jesus can command St. Faustina, his secretary, to "*Tell the world that I am Love and Mercy itself*". Just as the Incarnate Word of God is, in the mystery of his Ascension, in full Communion with the Holy Trinity so too are *Love and Mercy* inseparably linked because the eternal and loving Father, as Pope John Paul II states, "*is faithful to his fatherhood, faithful to the love that he has always lavished on*" mankind in its creation, redemption and glorification.

Our options are limited to two: if we do not enter eternity through the door of *Divine Mercy* we must enter it through *Divine Justice!* *Divine Mercy* guarantees us safe passage, in spite of our sinfulness. *Divine Justice* takes into account our sinfulness. Both doors express the *God's Love* for us (cf Jn 3: 16) because our only foundation is the revealed truth that *God is Love: "Deus Caritas Est!"*

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