



Grace and Mercy: The Generous Work of God in Our Lives

Grace and Mercy are faith words. Any Christian with some degree of religious education knows them, but let's be real. These words tend to be vague for us. They are not part of our everyday vocabulary.

The point of this article is to help us make these distant and distinct words become meaningful for our living.

First, grace. Very simply, grace is another word for God's abiding presence in us .

When we experience modifications in our lives that don't seem to arise from a natural or expected sequence of events, we are moved to wonder "Why this? Why now? Why me? Where does this come from? What does it mean?" Some will answer "Coincidence!" Others will say "Luck!" Believers say "Grace."

God: enticing, prompting, suggesting, saving, loving me into a deeper humanity.

Now, briefly, mercy. Only God is merciful. When we practice mercy, we do so in imitation of God.

Mercy is a word that Pope Francis has encouraged to be on our lips and in our hearts. He has named 2016 "A Year of Mercy" and asked us to practice it all year long individually and collectively. In "The Church of Mercy", a collection of his talks, Pope Francis reminds us that "God always thinks with mercy: do not forget this. God always thinks mercifully. He is the merciful Father!"

Compassion is a human trait. Mercy belongs to God. Our work is to participate in spreading mercy in the world.

Drawing on the words of Pope Francis over the years of his pontificate, here are some ways of linking grace and mercy - stretching our minds and hearts - to recognize grace and to learn and practice mercy, not just this year, but throughout our lives.

Grace is God's presence to us and in us. Without grace there is no mercy.

Without mercy, grace cannot thrive in us.

Grace gives us the freedom to imitate the mercy of God.

Mercy is the fruit of responding to God's grace.

Grace prompts us.

Mercy is the way grace in us reaches out to others.

Grace leads us to ask patient, persistent, strong, intelligent questions.

Mercy prompts us to explore those questions without fear of the answers.

Grace stirs hunger in us for justice and peace.

Mercy is the work of justice and peace.

Grace calls us to step out of ourselves.

Mercy shows us where to go.

Grace nourishes us.

Mercy uses for good the energy grace gives.

Grace moves us to stimulate unity around us.

Mercy makes unity tangible.

Grace takes us to the cross.

Mercy makes us share the cross others carry.

Grace is our primary encounter with God.

Mercy extends that encounter to others.

Grace is the presence of God within.

Mercy is the action of God within.

Grace “unties the knots” within us.

It unravels our resistance to merciful acts and ways of being.

Grace is the source of joy.

Mercy splashes the world with joy.

Grace makes us children of God.

Mercy moves us to embrace others as children of God.

Grace anchors resistance to sin in us.

Mercy makes us recognize our own sin,
and to forgive and let go of the sin of others.

The church sows grace in the world.
Mercy is the full grown fruit that feeds others.

Grace opens the church doors to the world.
Mercy makes us step through those doors without fear.

Grace makes sensitive, caring people open to human need.
Mercy is the way that human need is touched.

Wherever people come together to overcome senseless death, debilitating or destructive choices, evil in its many forms, grace and mercy are at work.

A Word about Mary, Full of Grace.

We turn for a moment to Mary, whom Pope Francis calls “Mother of Mercy.”
We remember how the angel Gabriel addressed her: *Hail Mary, full of grace*. Her graced life was woven with mercy as we study her in the New Testament, for example with her cousin Elizabeth, at Cana and at the foot of the cross. Mary bridges the life of Jesus. Now she belongs to us as well – a mother who is a model of grace and mercy.

A Blessing as We Close

May the grace of God enfold us and the mercy of God flow through us. May we embrace God’s gift of persistent love so as to become one with God and our neighbor. Amen.